









# CAN I BE A MYSTIC ?

*Letters to a Stranger in  
answer to his Question*



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• *Aelfrida Tillvard*



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“. . . We meet these persons in the east and in the west; in the ancient, mediæval, and modern worlds. Their one passion appears to be the prosecution of a certain spiritual and intangible quest—the finding of a ‘way out’ or a ‘way back’ to some desirable state in which alone they can satisfy their craving for absolute truth. This quest, for them, has constituted the whole meaning of life. . . .”

Evelyn Underhill. *Mysticism*.



## FOREWORD

THIS book is in reality what a former work of mine, *The Making of a Mystic*, merely pretended to be—namely, a correspondence between a middle-aged woman and a younger friend who asked for spiritual advice. It is interesting to compare the two. In *The Making of a Mystic* the director is always wise, and the seeker after God makes amazing progress. In real life the matter is much more difficult. The Author is often puzzled or clumsy or inadequate; the Stranger, who seems at times to know more than his teacher, is discouraged. Nor can the book be nicely rounded off. The Search after God continues; Author and Stranger are fellow-pilgrims on the Mystic Way.

The beginning of this correspondence has been omitted. In the first letter or two the Stranger approaches the Author with much politeness and diffidence and asks for help, while, of course, the Author replies that she is only too pleased to do anything she can. Later on, a number of letters that were too intimate for publication had to be omitted. Some readers will doubtless think that too much that is private and personal has been

included. I, the Author, and my Stranger friend do not like "telling the world" about how God has dealt with our souls, but, knowing what kind of book chiefly helped us, we feel that, if we have it in our power to help other people, we dare not refrain.

# CAN I BE A MYSTIC ?

## I. *From the Author to the Stranger.*

Cambridge.

**Y**OU ask me, "Can I be a mystic?" I answer, "Yes, by the grace of God, you can."

Of course, I should like to know just what was in your mind when you put that question, but I think I can guess. You feel two things—a distaste, and a hope.

Let us consider the distaste. If I am wrong in my diagnosis, you must tell me so. Your letter, however, was so much like a picture of my own thoughts and aspirations some years back, that I cannot help thinking that we have heard the same call and responded in much the same way. This, I believe, is a very ordinary experience, and I am glad that it should be so. A mystic is not an odd, queer, out-of-the-way being, but a normal man who tries to commune with God.

Very well, then, Stranger. You are not satisfied with yourself. You are restless, you cast about this way and that for satisfaction, you are impatient, you long for peace in your soul. Yet the more you

aspire after peace and try to rest in people and pursuits that once satisfied you, the more unhappy and baffled do you feel. Sometimes the whole world seems a poignant mockery, and life itself weariness and despair. You feel though, that there must be somewhere a secret source of beauty and of joy, could you but discover it, and its existence haunts you tormentingly.

*"I followed ever, where by land and sea  
Vanishing lovely shapes have haunted me,  
Swift touches, sounds and gleams—  
Hints of a perfect splendour . . ."*

for physical beauty seems at its best to promise spiritual beauty, and when our senses rest in the loveliness of Nature and the creations of perfect Art, we feel that there must be peace for our souls also, could we but discover it.

Your hope, then, is to find God, and to rest in Him. Now I should very much like to know, if you will not think me inquisitive, what your attitude towards earthly happiness is. This is very important. The soured and disillusioned man is not the right person to be a mystic. It is Father Rickaby, if I remember rightly, who tells an anecdote about a girl who wanted to be a nun because she had had three "disappointments". "I am afraid you will have another," observed the

Reverend Mother. "We do not accept young ladies as postulants because they have been crossed in love."

Do not turn to God in petulance and disgust, thinking the world is ugly and human relationships are not worth cultivating. The world has as much beauty in it as any of us have time and capacity to see and comprehend; while friendship and love, and the good things of this world, are delightful and satisfying if they are used in the right way.

Let me try to explain myself more fully. Take eating and drinking. Probably you enjoy giving milk to your cat, or feeding the animals at the Zoo, or providing your small boy with a good tea. But if you meet a man who spends most of his time thinking about food, and devising subtle and marvellous dishes and beverages, you feel contempt for him. Why? The cat, and the lions and the lemurs, and the small boy, are using food for its legitimate end, namely, to satisfy hunger. The gourmet, however, is gratifying his æsthetic sense and debasing it by offering it venison and champagne when he ought to be feeding it on pictures and music. Friendship can give you the delights of companionship, but it is not a substitute for religion. Work is the outlet for creative energy, but you must not ask it to give you complete happiness. You must accept the good things of this world for what they are, and what they can give

you, and not be out of temper with them if they cannot fulfil the ultimate desire of your soul. Earthly joy is good for its own purpose, but it cannot satisfy you fully.

So the mystic is not called upon to deny human affections, or to set no value on art or learning or work; he is required to put them in their place; to know how they may deck the palace of his soul ready for God, but how they cannot take the place of the Master of the palace.

Therefore, Stranger, if it be possible to you, do not say, "the world is evil" and "my friends have failed me". Do not start on the mystic way by being out of temper with ordinary life. If your friends have failed you, the fault may have been in yourself. Perhaps you have cared more for the mere ten commandments than for the beauty of holiness. I dare say the Pharisee was stuck all over with principles as a porcupine with quills, unassailable, impervious to criticism. Perhaps he wondered very much that his family found him hard to live with, and that he had not many friends.

It is better, then, that you should be conscious of much delight in the world and in human relationships, but that you should feel unsatisfied.

Now, when you write to me again, will you tell me something of your childhood? Were you "well and Christianly brought up"? Can you remember, 'way back in your childish consciousness, some

faint beginnings of mystical experience? I want to see what kind of foundation we have to build on. I am inclined to think that all children are something of mystics when they are very young, and can quote Thomas Traherne, as well, of course, as Wordsworth, in support of my opinion. What do you say?

Good night, Stranger. Think of much that has been glorious and wonderful in your life. Hold fast your hope of something more glorious and wonderful that is yet to come.



## II. *From the Stranger to the Author.*

London.

I NEVER dared hope that my last letter would receive such a long and sympathetic reply. Very many thanks for it. Yours has been read and re-read many times, and its contents at once flooded my mind with a thousand ideas, of which I will endeavour to outline a few, in order that you may have sufficient data upon which to formulate your diagnosis.

It is almost uncanny the way in which you read

between the lines of my letter! Brief as it was, you outlined my inward state all too accurately, and it is to be devoutly hoped that you will be able to help me to acquire that inner serenity which my soul craves.

You ask me what my attitude is towards earthly joys. Let me try to explain. I am not soured, but certainly disillusioned in the sense that I have long realized that earthly joys are transient, and that they can never adequately satisfy, in the deepest and fullest meaning of the word. Your anecdote is cogent—up to a point. I myself see the girl's point of view, and I, too, can share her feelings. Surely it is through such disappointments and troubles that our finite minds are brought to a standstill, as it were, and made to realize that all earthly joys are subject to the law of flux. And so instinctively follows a searching for those riches which neither rust nor decay. Have I made myself clear? The point I am trying to make is that so-called troubles and disappointments need not necessarily spell cynicism or sourness. This yearning after a deeper life may be actuated in a thousand different ways: does it not depend upon "the nature of the beast"? In my own case this desire has been smouldering within as far back as I can remember. At rare intervals it has burst into a tiny flame—only to (apparently) die out again, leaving me disconsolate and hungry.

As a small boy I recall being affected by the calm atmosphere which pervaded the convent where my sisters were at school. I used to visit them with my nurse, and loved the inexplicable mystery which seemed to fill the place. There was, I remember, an indescribable Quietness there, and the dim perpetual light and the fragrance of incense in the chapel moved me. Yes, I can now see that I yearned for something I could not understand, let alone explain. Young as we were, I can yet remember another phase, and this was that we often "prayed" to God to recover lost toys in the nursery. The prayers were answered, too!

What of myself, my home life? We lived and were brought up in refined surroundings, and my home was a Christian one. (Despite the fact that my sisters were educated at a Catholic convent, we were, however, strict members of the Church of England.)

Nothing of particular moment happened in my boyhood, save that I unconsciously sought to find the cause of the intangible longing which so often filled me. Indeed, my restlessness was noticeable, for I was often charged with "wanting the top brick off the chimney"!—an accurate description.

I was not especially brilliant at my studies at college, but those years are happy memories. With the rest of the school I attended chapel twice a day, was confirmed, and frequently

stroved to "know" God more intimately. The answers to my prayers (I fear that, as now, it was a case of "Hear Lord, for Thy servant speaketh!") impressed me. I believed, and still do, that all things are possible to God. I would repeat the words, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee"; it was, in fact, my motto which invariably helped me to recover when the sands of my faith were running low. Occasionally I prayed with a fervency which was almost desperate—yet, alas! I could never experience that "something" which I felt sure lay behind the veil separating the human and divine states of consciousness.

Thus I meandered through life: failing here, achieving there, yet never able to experience the actual "Presence".

Early in 1914 I came into touch with a small group of people who tried to live along the lines of the Sermon on the Mount. Immediately I became captivated; these people's serenity and lively faith thrilled me as I had never been thrilled before. Although not Quakers, they held silent meetings, which, as I grew accustomed to them, I found to be a source of deep spiritual delight and unfailing strength. Looking back upon those halcyon days it seems that I was completely transformed. Everything and everyone appeared radiant; I descried in the hitherto most uninspiring

scene or person the Divine touch, whilst to humble myself gave me ineffable joy. I walked on air! In a word, I had at long last found God, and my whole being was filled with love and gratitude. Thinking over this period, it is borne upon me how *intense* was this translation. Without the slightest effort I slipped into the art of meditation, and so utterly soothing and complete was this experience that I looked forward with eagerness to those times I set aside to make "contact". These were moments of indescribable loveliness, of a serenity I never dreamed existed. It was all so natural and so delightful. Deep within me I indeed knew that all was well, that nothing could destroy me, and it was with thankfulness in my heart that I lived my days.

I recall how wonderful the usually hot, dusty and uninspiring streets of London seemed! All men and women were my brothers and sisters, and I loved them for their beauty of mind and soul. In a word, I could then cry with Mary Coleridge:

*"The sense of fellowship is grown  
A radiant mystery . . ."*

and Edward Carpenter himself in his *Towards Democracy* voiced my innermost thoughts:

*"Deep as the universe is my life—and I know it, nothing can dislodge the knowledge of it, nothing can destroy, nothing can harm me. . . . O laughter! laughter! laughter! . . ."*

I now see, however, that at this time of spiritual enlightenment I lacked "ballast"; I lived too much on a plane removed from the world. Then the War came, and this was my undoing: the tender plant could not survive the fierce pressure imposed upon it, and when I later most needed strength—it vanished.

I struggled somehow through five years' Active Service—sometimes intoxicated with the material joys of life ("leave" was a mad, rushing, hectic business—a noisy effort to forget!), and sometimes cast into the deepest depths of despair. Later, when I got my commission in the Navy, and something of a more peaceful existence was afforded me, I would shut myself up in my cabin and feebly endeavour to recover my lost self—but in vain! Restlessness grew apace, and has more or less dogged me ever since. I still "knew" things, but it seemed that I was unable and incapable of feeling the absolute certainty of them as I had done in earlier days.

Upon my demobilization, in 1919, I made another attempt to recover that which I had lost. Knowing nobody who could advise me (I had little reliance in priests), I purchased books without number. Voraciously I imbibed the tenets of so-called New Thought, Occultism, Theosophy, Psychology, and the rest. I delved into the Eastern systems of religion, but discovered that I was

merely gaining knowledge intellectually. . . . Disgusted and distressed I turned to the Christian mystics for help, and studied the writings of Mme Guyon, Brother Lawrence, Jacob Boehme, and others. I tried—and still try—to settle down and meditate, because I know that stillness of mind alone is the key to the situation; but to meditate is irksome, impossible—if I may use such a word.

It is in this unfortunate state that you now find me. Desperate as everything appears, yet I know that there is hope. The intellectual pursuits I follow do not suffice: insatiably I crave for that interior peace, that sense of certainty, which were once my most treasured possessions. If you can help me I shall be grateful. . . . Can you not outline some practical exercises which will result in the renewing of my mind?

Are there any other details which will help you? I ought to add, perhaps, that I am thirty-three years old. I am married, and, although I have only been so for a comparatively short time—five years—both I and my wife are, thank God, wonderfully happy. We are, when occasion calls, cheerful young people, yet I suppose that we regard ourselves as “old-fashioned”, in that we love our home, our books, and our thoughts. . . . We realize that the true mystic is he who, whilst living in a physical world, must function therein, and therefore it is imperative that his feet be planted firmly and

squarely on God's earth. Yet a mystic, too, is he who can at will contact himself to, and travel in, higher spheres, and from there gather that strength which will enable him to fulfil his duties here as a true knight of the Holy Grail. My work is congenial, though I know full well that could I but learn to "ascend the mountain" again, it would be of a higher and better quality.

I do most sincerely apologize for the length of this letter. If it calls for an answer, I shall be more than gratified to receive it; should it not do so, then I know that you will respect my confidence by burning it.



### III. *From the Author to the Stranger.*

Cambridge.

THANK you for your letter, which I will answer in a moment. First of all, however, I want to tell you something. You can think it over at your leisure, and see if you find it relevant.

Rather more than two years ago I had a letter from another Stranger, who, like yourself, had read my books and wanted help. He is a man in an

important and responsible position, and spends most of his time ordering other people about. I have never met him, but I fancy I should find him rather formidable. He has always been a Christian and a High Churchman, one who never neglects any of the observances of the Church. When he first wrote to me, he was about sixty years of age. But he told me that he had never had any religious experience at all. He compared himself to a guest who had been invited to meet a distinguished visitor, and who, on arriving at the party, found that he sat in a corner unnoticed, while the great personage moved, smiling and gracious, among the other guests. This Stranger and I exchanged a good many letters, and then it happened that I was able to put him in the way of doing a very kind action to someone in trouble. Directly after, he wrote and told me that he had been favoured with a sense of the Presence of God, and that he was very happy. God was near him perpetually as a beloved companion.

That was last November. Yesterday I had another letter, from which I quote the following:

“I want you to know of a very wonderful spiritual experience I have just had. To explain the significance of it, I must tell you that I am a sceptic when anything by way of praise is said to me about myself. If people say: ‘We hope you are not going to leave—your influence over the men is

so good,' or 'We *are* so glad we are to have your help, as we find it indispensable,' I never take their words as being literally true. I say to myself, 'How kind of them to say these things—of course, it is their courtesy,' and I reason it out with myself to prove that there is no sound reason why it should be true in my case. My mind is an analytical one. . . . Now, it has never occurred to me that my attendance at church or devotions could possibly interest God, or add in any way to His satisfaction. I have gone to church, or said my prayers, or made my meditations for my own sanctification, and to get closer to God.

"On Sunday evening I was sitting in my study, idly turning over the pages of a book, when God spoke to me. I had thought that, if ever He did, I should find Him *beside* me, but it was not so. He possessed me. I was suffused by Him, and every part of me heard Him say: 'You are to do all these things to please Me. I am pleased by your love and devotion.' I *knew* God was with me, and the world seemed only to hold God and my soul. How long this lasted I do not know; it seemed an hour, but could only have been for a short time.

"I know now that I have had several like experiences before, but did not recognize them till this one great overwhelming experience was given me. I could not deny this; it was as though my own personality was removed and God Himself had

taken the place of myself. You will understand how almost impossible it is to express in words what is inexpressible; but I have done my best to tell you what happened. . . .”

Now, Stranger, note three things.

(1) This man was patient, and served God in “aridity” for many years.

(2) He received his reward at last.

(3) He found that he had often had similar experiences, but had not recognized or appreciated them.

Isn’t it like an episode in the *Water Babies*, that marvellous book of Kingsley’s? Do you remember? It wasn’t till Tom had helped the lobster out of the pot that he saw the water babies. And then he knew that he had seen them many a time, but had thought they were rocks or shells or seaweed, and had not heard their voices as they sang softly with the sea. . . .

To return to your letter.

I think you are right, and men turn to God for many reasons. The person, however, who is least likely to lead a healthy spiritual life is the one who still has a hankering after earthly joys, and feels that if *only* he had been successful in his schemes, happy in his loves and blessed with bodily health, he really would not have needed the consolations of religion. To my mind, everyone is equally in need

of religion. Suppose you are fortunate, knowing the joy of human affections, and the satisfaction of honest work well done; suppose you are winning appreciation from those whose opinion you value, and enjoying the opportunity to gratify your intellectual desires and your taste for the beautiful; you still feel that there is something lacking. A man, on the other hand, who is baffled and hurt by life, should turn the more eagerly to God, Who never disappoints anyone. Only, when he does so, he must not fancy that God is a *substitute* for the joys of life. He is the One in Whom both joy and sorrow find their beauty and significance.

I am very glad your religious impressions go right back into your early childhood. A memory of *calm* and *peace* connected with religion is of tremendous value. Modern psychologists tell us that the impressions we receive before we are five years old are more important than those of the rest of our life put together. The tiny child instinctively values affection and beauty, and feels in a dim way that the universe is full of both. How his elders corrupt him when they teach him that God is a kind of "giant with a big stick"—as a boy I know expressed it—or that he is a naughty child if he dirties his pinafore while he picks daisies to give to his mother! Quite small children put important things first. The baby loves his mother without considering that a title or a large

income make her more lovable. He admires a flower because it is pretty, and not because it is rare or costly. He has a feeling that there is Someone walking in the garden with him or permeating the soft darkness of his night-nursery, who loves him, and he is not troubled by theological considerations as to the nature of the Deity.

However, even if it be true, as I firmly believe, that all children are mystics by nature, we cannot go all through life existing on childish intuitions uncritically held. The sad thing is that something generally seems to go wrong pretty soon. A little boy of eight or nine is generally a much more pagan creature than he was at four or five. Why?

Now I hope you don't think me absurd, trying to go back and dig about in the remote past when what you are interested in is the problems that confront you at the moment. I do think, though, that you may have taken a wrong turning at the age of eight or so. And as my old nursemaid used to say, "The longest way round is the shortest way home", isn't it perhaps worth while retracing your steps?

How old were you, do you think, when you first had the brilliant idea of *coaxing something out of God*?\* This wonderful, benign, omnipotent Being, what a marvellous source of presents and

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\* NOTE.—This is badly and crudely put. Wishing to put the need for *disinterested love of God* in a striking way, the author was clumsy and unjust. Alas!—AUTHOR.

blessings for you? You were not much interested in what might be His designs for you, you were absorbed in the possibilities He seemed to hold out to you of your getting your own way. As you say yourself, "Hear, Lord, for Thy servant speaketh". That is exactly it. You probably began with petitions for cricket bats and bicycles; as you became better tutored in the ways of duty and virtue, you followed with prayers for a good place in class, and, later on, I dare say, that the German bullets might deviate a little on their deadly course. It is better to pray these prayers than not to pray at all. You are, however, now aiming at the highest spiritual good, and you must be stern and examine yourself. You must aim at *perfect disinterestedness*.

What then do you ask for now? God's will for you—or your will for Him?

I see I have only answered the first two pages of your letter. I will write again presently, and answer the other three. Have I been too severe? You see, I have my own mistakes to guide me in detecting yours.



#### IV. *From the Stranger to the Author.*

London.

I FULLY realize the necessity of your "going back and digging". Your position as "doctor" obliges you to examine the patient for any available symptoms before you can prescribe, with any exactness, a possible cure.

Soon after receiving your letter—for which thanks—I came across a significant passage in a novel I was reading. One of the characters was made to say, "Because you never knew you had a soul, you missed a lot of trouble!" And it set me thinking, for fortunately, or unfortunately, I have always been very much aware of my soul, and, in my endeavours to get my interior chamber in order, I have, it seems, merely succeeded in making a hopeless muddle of the job! If, on the other hand, I had left it alone to take care of itself, it would probably have gone up quite naturally and beautifully.

Your points of view interest me greatly, yet upon closer examination I should rather say that I strayed from the Right Path as soon as I lost that peaceful state of consciousness previously referred to. As far as I can recall, this state seemed quite complete, and was, I truly believe, induced by the highest motives. It was rather like hearing beautiful music

which soothed and strengthened me. I suddenly ceased to hear these transcendental strains, and then followed years of feverish searching—chiefly through the medium of books. Had I been wise in my day I should have done nothing save “be still, and know that I am God!” But I could not rest; my mind was feverishly anxious to find some short cut to the gates of Heaven. The result of my efforts to analyse my spiritual mechanism is that my hankering after a deeper and fuller life has been actuated through the conviction that such is, without exception, the only really satisfying mode of life. Learning what I since have, I see with crystal clarity the sheer common-sense of Christ’s teaching. It may not be easy to carry out, but it is, in my opinion, the most thoroughly practical and workaday philosophy ever given—and lived—in the whole history of humanity. Still, the tragic fact remains that true peace and happiness are not mine. This is why I badly need your counsel!

Most certainly as a child I prayed for childish things. Indeed, any prizes which I have ever won at school, I must attribute to the potency of my petitions rather than to the power of my intellect. Still, such answers do make an amazing impression on the mind. In those early days I used to think: “Well, I now have proof that God *is* Almighty. All I have to do is to ask and believe”. That “and believe” is the crux of the whole matter—it is the

“let go, let God” attitude that moves mountains, It is so clearly stressed and made definite in Mark xi, 23-24. Weymouth’s *Modern Speech* New Testament makes it even clearer than the Bible Testament. I really must quote, for it has been my sheet-anchor when my already weak faith has grown weaker:

“Have faith in God. I tell you in truth that if any one shall say to this mountain, ‘Arise, and hurl yourself into the sea’, and *has no doubt about it in his heart, but steadfastly believes that what he says will happen, it shall be granted him.*” Isn’t it absolutely fool-proof?

The experiences of your unknown correspondent are extraordinarily interesting and very wonderful, and the truth about sowing and reaping is once more confirmed.

To answer your question: I cannot say with any accuracy how old I was when I had “the brilliant idea of coaxing something out of God”. Low as is my opinion of myself, I must protest against the accusation that my sole reason for getting close to God was to get something out of Him. I can recall moments when I have, with the sincerity worthy of a saint, prayed “Thy will be done. . . .”

Through the aid of my letters and your own intuitions you are, of course, gathering sufficient material to put under your microscope. Well, I welcome this, and will do all I can to help you

in your task. Bombard me with as many questions as you will! Even, however, at the risk of your thinking me "lacking in ballast", I do want you to outline something practical for me: let me again repeat that I am hungry to know how I can attain that state of being "suspended in God", as Brother Lawrence describes it. Like many another, perhaps, I have a dim feeling that my life is intended for greater service; though what it is, I cannot say. Which reminds me, during the early months of the War, I felt somehow that I was being used as a protective influence to those around me—but this, of course, may quite possibly have been a figment of my imagination. What do you think?

Just two final questions: Do you see any immediate hope for me? Why did not that once-happy state endure?

As things now are, I oftentimes find life a difficult and tiresome business. I am acquainted with numerous people, but feel drawn to "know" few; in fact, my wife and I are both absurdly serious-minded, and we prefer people who do or say interesting things! Do not think, however, that we mope. We dance, play bridge, and lack (I think) neither wit nor laughter. It must be confessed, though that "times are hard", yet we endeavour to stave off worry with a deeper realization of the exhortation, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of Heaven——"

V. *From the Author to the Stranger.*

Cambridge.

YOU have a perfect genius for raising all kinds of difficult questions—perhaps that is why I find you so stimulating as a correspondent! Just look at all the matters I might discuss in replying to your last letter: answers to prayer; activity or passivity in the spiritual life; loving God for His gifts or for Himself alone; spiritual influence radiating from one man to another; and many more subjects besides. Give me time, dear Stranger, give me time. Think of me as a slow-footed but attentive servant, anxious to serve you a full dinner of instruction, but unable to bring in the sweets when only the soup is ready!

Will you let me make a few more preliminary remarks before I suggest any “spiritual exercises” to you?

I don’t think, indeed, that you have “made a hopeless muddle” of your spiritual life. It did seem to me that, as a boy, you rather got into the habit of asking God for what you wanted, instead of listening to Him and trying to discover what He wanted for you. Haven’t you sometimes felt a little aggrieved that, with all your prayers and searching, you had not found lasting inward peace? But saints did not experience a continuous state of

“sweetness” and “consolation” and “sensible devotion”. Such uninterrupted calm, coming at the beginning of one’s spiritual life, would probably be very enervating. It should be achieved after many years of varied experience. I am quite sure, however, that no effort and striving after God is ever wasted, and that the conscious directing of our affections and desires towards Him is always ultimately rewarded. There comes a point, in the Mystic Way, when passivity seems to be needed, but it was striving that brought you so far. Please do not feel in any way discouraged.

Let us, however, look back for a while over the way that you have come, and see if we can find out just where you stand, and what the next step is to be.

The important matter that we now have to consider is this: why was the happy state of mind, which came from your contact with aspirants trying to live the Sermon on the Mount, so transient? Was it, because transient, illusory? Were you working on the wrong lines, building on an insecure foundation? What was amiss?

Now let me tell you one thing. A great deal more is known about the Mystic Way than was the case, say, fifty years ago. I hope you don’t mind! Some people object most strongly to the idea that religious experience should be the object of investigation, and, still more, that the laws which govern

spiritual life and development should be known. They declare that it is all "too sacred", and think psychologists are gratuitously desecrating holy mysteries when they import law and order, and, perhaps, even common-sense into these secret temples of the Lord. I suppose these same people consider that the stars are less wonderful now that astronomers can plot their orbits and estimate their age, and roses less beautiful when cultivated in a systematic way. Perhaps they even find their own children less lovable because they know the average weight of children of that age! I must say I don't feel that way at all. If I had had the slightest idea that the spiritual life was subject to law—while yet, of course, remaining incalculable, just as life is always incalculable—what a tremendous amount of anguish I should have been saved! I had always looked on religion as nothing but a matter of correct intellectual belief, and puzzled over Theology until I could not see the wood for the trees. When I stumbled, almost by chance, into religious experience, I thought I was mad, not knowing that my feelings were the most natural thing in the world, and by no means unusual. Nothing reassured and comforted me more than did the discovery that my way of rapture and amazement was the normal well-trodden path of the mystic. I intensely disliked the idea of being a spiritual freak. It was sheer delight to read my

own experiences described by men and women who had felt the Presence of God. And I was amused and touched and enormously interested when I found psychologists gravely investigating the matter from the outside, and being reverently scientific or contemptuously scientific as their pre-conceptions or prejudices suggested.

Our spiritual life, then, is, like the rest of the universe, under the sway of law. Not capriciously, not arbitrarily does God deal with His children. Yet our spiritual life is as rich and diversified as personality, and as spontaneous as love.

To return to the Mystic Way. Psychologists have done great service in carefully noting the facts. Being disinterested observers—they ought to be if they are not!—they are perhaps in a better position than the mystics themselves to collect evidence and sort out descriptions. We may accept their facts while reserving to ourselves the liberty of differing from their conclusions.

It seems to be a fact, then, that the beginner in the spiritual life is apt to have very wonderful and dazzling experiences quite outside his normal range of consciousness. He may see heavenly lights, hear Divine words or music, and feel himself transported into a spiritual world more real than the material world to which he is accustomed. I remember a friend of mine telling me that after these experiences she used to be obliged to touch the

furniture in her room to assure herself that she was still in the body, so rapt had she been. The feelings of *adoration, joy, exaltation, wonder*, come from intense and passionate communing with Our Lord, and with God, the Father. Suddenly, intellectual doubts melt away, temptations slacken their grip and slink off, difficult duties appear easy, repulsive people are all at once lovable. Oh, what you experienced *was* beautiful, wasn't it? wonderfully, gloriously beautiful and true! And it was not mere emotion unrelated to ordinary life. You *were* in contact with something real. It showed itself in action. You wished to make your acts as offerings to lay on an altar, and for a time all your life was a ritual performed to the glory of God. There was a radiance and a glamour over everything. The waste places of the earth were filled with light and song.

Why had it all happened? And, if it came, why did it go?

Of course the experience did not really occur suddenly, though it may have seemed to do so. It was connected, 'way back, with your childish intuitions and impressions. Even when you were not consciously seeking God, the mysterious work of preparation was going on in the womb of your soul. (Nowadays we think in terms of the "unconscious", and feel very enlightened and up-to-date in these matters, but the wonder and the mystery

remain.) God, of course, was always sending out messages to you, though you were not "tuned in" to receive them. I think the analogy of "wireless" has helped many people to understand the puzzling question of why some men hear God speak and others do not, and why the same person listens to God easily at one time, and at another is cut off from Him. Perhaps it was the spiritual support you drew from those other aspirants which finally put your receiving-set in order. (I hope you don't think this simile impossibly vulgar and commonplace, but really, one has to use what analogies one can, in describing the indescribable!) And then the miracle happened, and you heard God speak!

The first time anything happens is always more amazing than the second or the third time. Your first glimpse of snow mountains will bring tears to your eyes—afterwards you experience a more placid feeling of beauty-seeking satisfied. The first time you stand in a Gothic cathedral and look down the forest-aisle of pillars, you marvel that man can have built so well—at your tenth cathedral you will be consulting Baedeker to see its special features, and be busy with intelligent appreciation rather than overcome with awe. Very likely, however, in your first impression you fail to notice many essential beauties which you only gradually discover. The first rapture is glorious, but it isn't everything!

And, of course, it passes away! Human beings are not made so as to be able to tolerate continuous rapture. It was one of the problems of my *very* small childhood why—please forgive me again!—the second help of pudding *never* tasted as nice as the first! You know yourself that the last quarter of an hour of a symphony is probably just as good as the first, but you feel a certain relief when the finale comes. And I sometimes wish a mentor would tell young husbands and wives that they do not necessarily love each other less if the last few days of the honeymoon drag a little. We cannot always breathe the rarefied air of the spirit, and we need to come down from the hill-top and walk once more in the ordinary ways of life.

There was nothing *wrong* when your ecstatic feelings passed. You only made the mistake of paying far too much attention to your moods and states of consciousness. In a word, you considered that religion was a matter of the emotions. The most important thing, really, is the *will*.

I haven't nearly finished talking yet, but you will be tired of all my illustrations and analogies, so good-bye for to-day.



VI. *From the Stranger to the Author.*

London.

YOU are wonderfully patient with me, you know, and I enjoyed your last letter immensely. In order, however, to give you an opportunity of getting abreast with any outstanding questions I have bombarded you with, I will confine myself to commenting upon the points you raise.

I know that the advances made by science and psychological research have been tremendous during the last half-century. The War, I suppose, has especially accelerated this study? To the orthodox, this laboratory investigation *is* apt to strike as vulgar—not to say irreverent—but when the subject is viewed broadly, it is encouraging to realize that scientific research is just like different systems of religions: all seek to solve the problem of the First Principle. When one is first confronted with this scientific research, one is inclined to visualize the ludicrous spectacle of worthy old gentlemen testing, say, the atmosphere of Heaven in gas-jars! It *is* an inspiring thought, though, to think that everything in the universe is co-related, that the solidest rock, as well as the fragile flower, or the body of man, is pervaded by a common force. To know that the rock is really a vibrating mass of energy;

of countless billions of atoms in which electrons revolve at an incomprehensible speed is simply staggering.

“All Nature,” says Horatio W. Dresser, “reveals God. The sea, the sky, the mountains, the complex life of the great cities, the simple life of the country . . . are feeling after Him.” If one can but realize this stupendous fact, we need never feel cut adrift from God. “Why should I feel lonely,” sings Thoreau. “Is not our planet in the Milky Way?” Why, indeed?

It is, too, a great relief to know that there is such a thing as an immutable law of the universe, for it cuts out the possibility of chance. The law of Karma has solved many an earnest seeker’s problems, yet it is merely a repetition of Christ’s “As a man sows, so shall he reap”.

Thank you for elucidating the mystery regarding the “withdrawal” of my experience. I will try to cultivate a feeling of thankfulness for having been given it.

You are right about the first time things happen, but do you not think that my whole trouble lay in the fact that I *did* lack balance? I somehow feel that I answered the spiritual call too readily, too completely. So entirely did I live in the new world that I had discovered that my feet ceased to touch earth! I regarded everything of the world as a snare: I preferred, when not amongst my own

coterie, to be alone with my thoughts; I refused to go to theatres, to eat meat, and quite a lot of other quite harmless things; in short, I was developing one side of myself at the expense of the other.

Well, I think that I have learned my lesson. This is, I think, very important, and the danger of soaring too rapidly, a very real one to the neophyte. Still, the experience was more than worth the fall!

But (without self-pity) I want to tell you that for about fourteen years I have experienced the terrible feeling of separateness, of spiritual aridity, and I grow weary of the loneliness.

Generally I am of a cheerful disposition, for my philosophy helps me—more or less. But a mood of inward depression now assails me, and everything seems wrong. My power of “sticking out” weakens, and I feel that the game is hopeless (although I know full well that it is not!).

Don’t you despair, however, O Straightener. If I don’t send this off right away I know that I shall be thoroughly ashamed of myself—when I am in my right mind—for telling you this. The fact is, though, that I never mention these “darknesses” to anyone, but having now found somebody who can possibly help, it is perhaps natural that I should expose my weaknesses so flagrantly.

But I know it is my own fault: you are right when you say that what I need is strengthening of the will. For the past few days (as happens

occasionally) I have felt tired, both physically and spiritually; and to meditate on peace—well, the mere thought has been almost nauseating!

What I need and desire, more than anything, is some revitalizing power to flow through me: some sort of shattering spiritual detonation which will arouse me and fire me with greater zeal. I have realized for many years that to live without God is death, absolute death.

Perhaps my mood has been occasioned through some upsetting treatment towards me at my business. Now I am not going to be foolish enough to "grouse" to you, but let me add that my work, which I like and have interest in, *is* cast in unsympathetic places. Yes, I know the remedy for this, too, O Author. Your reply to this childish reviling is very rightly: "Do your best; all is well. Pray without ceasing, and be kind to them that hurt you." It seems, though, that I haven't the strength. I want—and very badly, too—a good drench of the Power of the Holy Ghost. I am terribly serious.

This is a hateful letter, but I must send it to you; yet I hope you won't be too shocked. It may—who knows?—serve a useful purpose by providing you with yet another fragment of myself which may assist you to get the complete picture. I feel sure that if you read all my letters through, from the very beginning to the present one, you will see

that this outburst is not unnatural. The underlying "theme" is really the outcry of a starving man. With Vaughan I say :

*"O, how I long to travel back,  
And tread again that ancient track!  
That I might once more reach that plain  
Where first I left my glorious train;  
From whence the enlightened spirit sees  
That shady city of palm trees."*

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## VII. *From the Author to the Stranger.*

Cambridge.

IF you lived in Cambridge you would not think of scientists as old! Classical archaeologists are old, and metaphysicians, wandering about in vast plains of thought that have already been worked over a thousand times, are very old indeed, but our best scientists and psychologists are young, whatever may be their years. When I heard, the other day, a lecture on Recent Progress in Biology, by Professor Julian Huxley (an Oxford man, by the way), I thought I had never met anyone so

typical of youth. He was a pioneer full of vigour and buoyancy in a world where nothing was too marvellous to be true. The most modern scientists, such as Prof. Eddington, for instance, are not materialists; nor do they go round trying to prove that knowledge has done away with wonder. On the contrary. They come back from their laboratories to tell us that the basis of the universe is spiritual, that we are lapped round with mystery, and that the truth about the cosmos is far more startling than our boldest speculations can yet conceive. I have no objection to your elderly gentlemen trying to examine the atmosphere of Heaven in a gas-jar. If he was honest, he would end by bowing his head, and saying: "There is something here that I do not yet understand."

Now will you for a moment allow me to consider your particular problems from the standpoint of the student of religious psychology, and particularly of the person who has made a special study of the psychological development of the mystics. Let me say at the outset that when I declare that this or that is a normal occurrence in the mystic, I do not mean that all mystics are alike or that the unfolding of their spiritual lives is confined within certain hard and fast limits. When you read a book on Adolescence, in which some professor discourses on "Storm and Stress", and so forth, you do not feel that he has said the last word about the

individual Jane and Peter in whom you happen to be interested, though he may, by the enunciation of general principles, have thrown much light on their characters, and enabled you to help them in the difficult business of growing up.

I assure you then that there is nothing to alarm or distress you in the passing of your time of religious exaltation. Far from having "made a hopeless muddle of your spiritual life", you have merely been going through well-defined stages, and progressing along the Mystic Way. "But," you say, "you told me I made mistakes. Aren't you contradicting yourself?" Not at all, dear Stranger. Of course you made mistakes, but they were right mistakes, if I may be allowed a paradox, to make. And now, far from being troubled because you do not know whether you can ever be a mystic or not, you may congratulate yourself on being well advanced in the third section of the pilgrims' path.

Let me explain. The first stage is the stage of restless and clamorous seeking, when you have little idea of asking God what He wants of you, but demand peace and certainty, and, maybe, even ecstasy. This brings its reward. There comes a period of extreme exaltation, marked by asceticism, withdrawal from "the world", and craving for intense feeling. I think if you look at yourself as you were then, you will see that you were not free

from a taint of self-righteousness. Also you had not been able to make a complete synthesis between the claims of ordinary life and the claims of religious emotion. You were treating religion as an *escape*, a “treat”—if I may use a childish word—a miser’s store of rapture to be gloated over in secret, a wonder that might vanish in the crude light of day. Exactly what all mystics do under the circumstances. There is nothing to worry about; God was training you, as He has trained thousands of men and women who longed to find Him and to hold Him fast. Please look back over that time and see that it was well with you. I don’t think you “answered the spiritual call too readily, too completely”. No one can do that. You did, however, make the mistake of thinking that when you *felt* good, you necessarily *were* good. A state of intense spiritual fervour is often full of danger, and beset with temptations to the kind of spiritual pride which inevitably brings a fall. Whereas, on the other hand, when you are doing God’s will while your soul feels as dusty and unspiritual as London streets in August, you are really making some progress.

Of course the third stage, in which you now stand, is a painful one. In your case, the War, with all its terrors for the nerves, and its temptations for the character, accentuated your difficulties. What would be mere “aridity” at home, might be

sheer despair at the Front. I almost wonder that any man who was at all sensitive could have kept his sanity through the War. I think, if I were you, I should not dwell too much on what you suffered then. Some things are best forgotten. The united will of civilized nations is now set towards peace, and I believe our children and grandchildren will never have their personal problems complicated by another war. Be that as it may, your present state, which in many ways resembles the first stage of your pilgrimage, is perfectly normal and natural. "Yes, doctor," you observe, "but it hurts all the same."

I know it does. What are we going to do now? Well, do you know exactly what you want? Is it the continuous sense of God's presence, accompanied by a capacity to do His will?

Will you try a very simple kind of meditation, even if distasteful? Set aside a definite time every day, say ten minutes morning and evening—the times I prefer are seven-thirty in the morning and ten at night. Choose a posture that suits you, one which is neither so comfortable that it makes you feel sleepy, nor so uncomfortable that it distracts your attention. Put yourself in the presence of God. Offer yourself to Him with all your restlessness and imperfections, and ask Him what He requires of you. Say, very slowly: "O Infinite God, I adore Thee." Then wait. Listen.

I want you to keep a record of what happens. Perhaps you don't think anything *will* happen. Well, in another letter perhaps I will tell you what you may reasonably expect. Remember, however, my other Stranger-friend who had failed to recognize God's voice, though he had heard it many times. In any case, you may have some interesting thoughts while meditating, and you can write *them* down.

Now you must do something else. If you are like most people, you find that in your everyday routine there is one special duty that you tend to shirk. Perhaps you have to do with some individual whom you particularly dislike, or perform some task that is more irksome than all the other tasks. Will you, as a complement to your meditations, perform this particular duty with religious intention. Offer it to God. Do this every day, and don't forget!

You said something in one of your letters about having a feeling that God was calling you to some work, but you did not know to what. Remind me to comment on this next time I write.

Good-bye, Stranger. We *are* making a little progress, aren't we?

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VIII. *From the Same to the Same.*\*

Cambridge.

**N**OW that we have embarked on a course of obstacles that often stand in the way of meditation, let us consider some of the progress.

*Hatred*, secret or open, is the first. You would be surprised to know how frequently it is met with. When Our Lord told the would-be worshippers to be reconciled with their brethren before they came with their gifts to the altar, He was not only giving them moral counsel, but excellent advice from a psychological point of view. Nothing seems to be more inimical to the peaceful mood of meditation than irritation against one's fellow-men, coupled with the sense of being injured, misunderstood, ill-treated. If you are cherishing a grievance against society or against an individual, you will make no progress in your spiritual exercises. "Hatred" may seem to you, perhaps, too strong a term to use. Perhaps. Even vague annoyance and animosity can play havoc with your peace of mind. So dig deep in your unconsciousness, if need be, drag the horrid thing out into the light and—kill it.

Let me give you an instance. Some years ago a

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\* Sent before the answer to the previous letter was received.

man came to ask for some help in his spiritual life. He was a doctor, working chiefly among the poor, a believing Christian, a man deservedly admired and looked up to. Yet he said he was in despair because, with all his efforts, God seemed further and further away. He tried a course of meditation. It soon became obvious that something quite definite was holding him up. We went into the question, and he told me. He had never married, but for many years had enjoyed a friendship of a very satisfying and intimate kind, without any suggestion of anything morbid, with another man. Then someone, whether man or woman I do not know, intervened, and entirely alienated his friend's affection. He had enough nobility of character and true regard for his friend to be able to forgive *him*, but he was never able to forgive his supplanter. All he could do was to turn his thoughts away, and to try to forget as far as possible. Being a good man, he would not, I am sure, have done his enemy an injury, even if he had had a chance. But far down in his mind resentment and dislike lay buried. When he brought these feelings out into the open and looked at them he was horrified. At first he said, "I cannot forgive. It is not human nature to forgive." "Of course it isn't," I replied. "But what is grace for? I remember, when I was young, wishing I *had* an enemy in order that I might prove the efficacy of grace by using it to forgive

him. Do try. What an interesting opportunity."

"I cannot," said my patient.

He went away, and for a couple of years I heard no more of him.

One day I was surprised by his coming to tell me that he had mastered his resentment, and that inward peace had followed as a natural consequence.

Of course, in this man's case the trouble was conveniently obvious. In yours and mine it may be less definite, more elusive. Let us consider a minute. Do you know of anyone who annoys you by a silly, patronizing attitude, who greets you with an irritatingly condescending smile as though you were a bright child, while all the while you feel you are a better man than he is? Is there a superior of yours who is asking work of you that pays, and which you feel is less than your best, and do you loathe him for it? Have you a relation or so-called friend who is always imputing mean motives to you, taking all your actions the wrong way, persistently misinterpreting your kindness to himself? Perhaps you invite an old uncle to dinner because you think he looks lonely, and he assumes you are after his money, and then you want to kick him! And is there anyone whose success makes you envious, who is occupying a position which you think you could fill better than he does, who is swinging through life in a Rolls-Royce, while you are still saving up to buy a second-

hand Austin Seven? Well, dear Stranger, if this is the case, your little animosities, tiny though they may be, are acting as so much grit in the machinery of your spiritual life, and the sooner you get rid of them the better. Examine yourself. Is anyone, I wonder, *quite* free from such hindrances?

The second obstacle is almost as common as the first. How shall I describe it? *The attempt to conform to an obsolete and unsuitable pattern of holiness.*

It is an odd thing, but very few people, in the spiritual life, *dare to be themselves*. The love of sanctity so often goes with admiration of mediæval types of goodness. The man or woman who wants to be a mystic says to himself, "Oh, if I could but be like St. Teresa or St. John of the Cross!" He then embarks on a long and tedious process of crushing the round peg of his own individuality into the square hole of an out-of-date form of virtue, and not only making himself unhappy but depriving Society of the particular kind of goodness which it now needs. The mystic must not all the time be looking back, dwelling, as it were, in the dim light of some ancient cathedral. He should be a pioneer, exploring the possibilities of communion with God and service of his fellow-men *now*, in the present day, under modern conditions.

I made this mistake myself, and so I feel rather strongly on the subject. One of the most noble

and lovely devotional books in the world is *The Imitation of Christ*, and for many years it was my chief spiritual food. I am more than grateful to its author. It is, however, far too cloistered in its ideals to guide the natural development of most Christians to-day. Not that I disapprove of convents and monasteries. I should not dare to do so. For a certain type of character they offer exactly the right life, and they help the world enormously by presenting the sight of companies of devout people who care for nothing but God. But the point of view of the cloister is not good for everybody. For one thing, it is not the point of view of Our Lord. It is based on fear of the world, detachment, denial, austerity. Christ has but one foundation—love.

Some of the “Imitation” is, of course, still applicable to men and women nowadays. It is difficult to read through the directions for self-examination before Holy Communion without a blush of conscious shame that one’s hidden faults should be so well understood. The general spirit, however, of the book is remote from us to-day. For instance, Thomas à Kempis, or whoever is the author, declares that whenever he went among men he came back less of a man than before. I love solitude, but I should be dishonest if I tried to pretend, or wanted to imagine, that my fellow-creatures had a bad effect on me. Sometimes I

come back from them feeling a delicious intellectual exhilaration, all my pulses quickened at the sight of fresh wonders waiting to be discussed and investigated. Sometimes I am touched and humbled by meeting greater affection than I deserve, or filled with awe at the courage and moral greatness of others. The mere exchange of pleasant platitudes about the weather gives me a sense of general goodwill and harmony. Meeting foolishness and sorrow and sin impresses on me the need for seriousness, compassion and faith. I hardly ever return to solitude after companionship without feeling the value of life heightened, and being amazed at the richness and enthralling interest of people and circumstances. Sometimes I merely want to go on chuckling to myself for quite a long time with a sense of delight that humour is inherent in the nature of things. And all those years when I was trying to model myself on the monastic ideal—oh, dear, oh, dear!

That is why, I think, instead of merely looking back at the past and sighing for the ancient days of faith, you are better employed in cultivating a sense of *vocation*, and trying to discover what new place God is expecting you to step into. Let us give thanks, certainly, for the ancient times of faith, and for the saints who have gone before us, but don't let us be trying always to live in the Middle

Ages and be worrying because we can't live up to antiquated notions of serving God.

Good-bye for to-day, Stranger. I am not quite sure that the advice I gave you about forgetting the War as far as possible was sound—we may have to return to the subject again later on.



## IX. *From the Stranger to the Author.*

London.

YOU will be thinking that I have forgotten you—so long have I kept you for a reply to your last letter. The fact, is, I have not felt "moved" to write, chiefly, perhaps, because I wanted to be able to report encouraging news about my meditations—but more of this anon.

It is very splendid to learn about your scientists, who are cognisant of the fact that the basis of our universe is spiritual, but what is this Keith has been saying about the soul dying with the body? I liked Lodge's observations. They made me feel that much of his brilliance as a scientific authority has been acquired interiorly. Professor Keith, on the other hand, seems to me to be an excellent example of the scientific mind which will only

accept those problems which can be "proved" in the laboratory. He deduces exteriorly—having perhaps no inner experience to guide or substantiate his theories. Nothing is so magnificently or terribly real as the experience of the soul, is it?

And now I come to the part which I have been trying to evade! I have meditated according to your instructions, but my efforts have neither met with anything startling nor with any sense of peace or upliftment. On the contrary, as you will see from the record I enclose, the result is conspicuous by its uneventfulness.

I must be perfectly fair, though. I have seldom—if ever—remembered to perform my unpleasant duties as an offering to God. In those early days of which I have written I used to be able to do so, but I fear that I have acquired a thick shell of materialism around me which needs dissolving before I can hope to receive any sense of Grace. I wonder whether you are as disappointed with me as I am with myself?

By the way, you asked me to remind you to comment upon my statement that I thought God had a special work for me. Does this really need any observation? I mean, has not everyone a definite mission to fulfil?

Forgive my fractious mood, please. Good night!



X. *From the Author to the Stranger.*

Cambridge.

YOU are very impatient. Do you think that a few days' meditation is going to change your whole nature and at once make all your spiritual life easy and delightful? I do not find the record you send me in the very least discouraging. I will only suggest one change, and that is that whenever you feel inclined to be depressed or are particularly unprepared for meditation you should just let your imagination talk to you and show you pictures of Our Lord's life at Nazareth between the episodes of His speaking to the doctors in the temple and His attending the marriage at Cana—a period of about eighteen years, I suppose, without a single incident, apparently, worth including in the chronicles. More than half His life spent at the carpenter's bench! And you are impatient because God has not given you a sign as to your "vocation" when you have been meditating a couple of days. You lead a life of constant strain, and there is little in your circumstances which makes for inner serenity, so you have much to contend with. Please do not be cast down, but persevere, remembering that, even if nothing "happens", you are training your will. Don't you

agree with me that a discipline of the will is what you most need?

I will now, with your permission, continue what I was saying about obstacles to meditation.

I am sure, dear Stranger, you often find me terribly inconsistent in these letters. Perhaps, however, the contradictions are more apparent than real, and I am merely trying to describe different parts of the Mystic Way or give guidance more suited to one stage than another. I am always myself making new discoveries and seeing new beauties, and I can't help getting thrilled over them and wanting to talk to you about them.

Forgive me then, please, if I begin by recommending that you should study the works of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross. You must not slavishly imitate those two saints, but they are experts in the spiritual life, and every word they say is worth listening to. St. John of the Cross was perhaps a little too intolerant of human weakness—he was like a professor who once tried to teach me mathematics, and who, after inspecting a problem for a moment in silence, would see the answer and wait with an air of pitying contempt while I floundered among the figures. St. Teresa, on the other hand, was accustomed to deal with young women, many of them timid, half-educated and commonplace, and she knew that the Divine Potter does not disdain to make beautiful vessels

even out of the poorest clay. St. Teresa comforts and inspires me—St. John of the Cross keeps me humble. If you are not already familiar with the works of these two saints, I suggest your making their acquaintance through Professor Alison Peers' *Studies of the Spanish Mystics*. He seems at once to put the reader in the right mood for understanding the men and women of whom he writes. Speaking of St. John of the Cross, he says: "Of all Spanish writers, St. John of the Cross has left us the most complete account of the higher slopes of Mount Carmel. He has touched but lightly upon the lower stages of the journey, but the grace, eloquence and power with which he writes of the more ethereal realms have perhaps been exceeded by no other mystic in all literature. Parts of his work are beyond all description. They can only be fitly read with the hushed reverence of a receptive soul."

Do read, anyhow, what he says about beginners, and particularly about the stumbling-block—which I put third on my list—of *impatience*. One of the greatest obstacles to progress in our spiritual life is our impatience with ourselves. Once we gave a tremendous leap forward—temptations seemed to have no power, devotions were easy and delightful, the radiance of God was around us. And now we creep like snails, and, really, if we don't go a bit faster we feel we shall never get anywhere at all.

Of course, it is right to be pretty severe with yourself. I am not advocating a sloppy tolerance of your familiar sins. What I am tilting at is a certain peevish disgust with religion and with trying to be good; because you find you cannot become a saint in a day. You want to treat your soul as a mother treats her child, or a wise gardener his flowers. Believe that in your soul there is a principle of growth, that God made it to grow from a tiny beginning to great beauty, that you co-operate by giving it the best possible conditions and *Deus dat incrementum*. It would help us, I think, to "take from our souls the strain and stress", as Whittier puts it, if we could understand that our souls, like other living things, possess "biological impulse towards completeness", and that holiness is not an artificial discipline imposed from without, but the very stuff and nature of our soul itself. Don't you feel a sensation of *having reached home* when you do a good action, or when you commune with God? Of course I know that everyone also possesses the impulse which sent the prodigal into the far country--the impulse to see whether self-indulgence makes you happy--but you find sooner or later that you have mistaken your own nature, and that the real *you* can only be satisfied by a return to goodness and to God.

So we must not be impatient if spiritual growth

be *slow*. The fabric of our inner life, if hastily put together, might crash in a moment.

I sometimes think it is easier for women to be patient than for men! The months that we must wait before we have the joy of holding our baby in our arms, the years that elapse before the child's character and intelligence grow strong and lovely, days that seem æons when health flows slowly back after illness; all these teach us how to pray and to wait. I have a very impatient nature, and would like to see an acorn grow into an oak tree in twelve hours, while I stayed up all night to dance round it, so I know what it feels like to submit to the discipline of unhurried Time. Patience, then, Stranger, as you watch your soul grow in grace.

*Later.* I hope you do not think I am deluging you with too much good advice. I do want to make sure, however, that you do not get discouraged *this* time. I look forward to a stage when you will not need my help at all, when you will know much more than I do. So I want to give you everything I have which may be of use, in order that you may the more quickly find me entirely superfluous!

Well, then, let us go on talking about the difficulties that confront the aspirant when he meditates. One of the most persistent is *distraction*. "I canna meditate," said Mary Slessor, the pioneer missionary of Calabar. "Me thoughts gang a'

ways." That is not, however, a reason for giving up meditation. Concentration is chiefly a matter of practice. Wandering thoughts are not a sin.

If you are not used to spiritual exercises, the best plan is to begin with "discursive meditation". Take a central idea, such as the Fatherhood of God, and allow it to suggest what thoughts it will. Remind yourself that you are in the Presence of God, and mere courtesy ought to keep your thoughts from running off to anything too silly. The fact that your thoughts are *moving*, passing from one consideration to another, making acts of love and gratitude and adoration, is generally enough to keep them fully occupied, and if a stray distraction knocks at the door and reminds you that you have forgotten to pay the plumber's bill, and that you ought to write to Aunt Jane, you can generally tell it you are busy, and it must wait.

The real difficulty begins when you wish to immobilize your thoughts and practise Contemplation. Sometimes, of course, the transition from Meditation to Contemplation occurs spontaneously. You have been pursuing a train of thought with eager interest. Quite suddenly the process stops. You find with amazement, perhaps even with fear, that you cannot think. Then you become aware of a stillness, a radiance, a reality which you had never known before. With all your earthly thoughts and personal preoccupations shed from

you, you are in the presence of God. So small do you seem, that your consciousness of yourself moves to a vanishing point and disappears. God fills the universe—His power, His beauty, His love, His will. Yet you are not lost in Him, but only surrounded and dominated by Him. From Him you draw strength and peace and inspiration to goodness, and, as your self-consciousness gradually flows back, you worship Him and give Him thanks, and turn, full of wonder and courage, to face the sorrows of the world. Indescribable experience, more joyful and true than all other experiences, known only to those who have felt it!

When, however, you set yourself to learn Contemplation, or return to the shrine into which you stumbled unknowingly, you find yourself tormented by distracting thoughts. Some saints have believed that the devil himself sent special messengers of evil to hinder them at their devotions. Personally I do not think that I need make anyone but myself responsible for unwelcome thoughts. Most of the distractions are merely silly and tiresome. It is very humiliating to find oneself thinking of a new frock when one has set out to contemplate the Deity; but, after all, it helps to keep one humble. A good plan is to choose a sacred sentence, and whenever one's thoughts fly away, to repeat it, a gentle note sounded to summon them back. (The Hindu practice of

*mantra yoga*—the constant repetition of a sentence until the mind is dazed and drugged—is not generally suitable for aspirants in the West, though it is psychologically quite defensible.) This text, seriously and persistently set before the mind, will often effectively wall in the wandering attention.

There is one type of distraction, however, that needs special treatment. I refer to unwanted thoughts about sex. Of course, in the case of monks and nuns, their personalities suffered from a suppressed sex-complex with no adequate means of sublimation, and the intrusion of such thoughts was inevitable. The married state and the state of celibacy each involve a particular set of problems and kind of suffering. There is nothing strange or wrong in this.

But why does meditation lay some people open to a special danger of impure thoughts, and what is to be done?

There is some definite psychological connection between religion and sex. Some time, perhaps, I shall have enough historical knowledge and enough insight at my disposal to enable me to understand exactly what the connection is. My present ideas may be so vague as to be worthless, but here they are.

Our most fundamental needs are, it has been said, the hunger for bread, the hunger for sex, and the hunger for the Infinite. These three lie at the

very base of our nature, and are inescapable. When we stir up and stimulate the last and most important of the three, we very likely also rouse the second. Moreover, God is not only the source and fountain of our spiritual life, He is the Creator of the material universe as we know it, and it is He who has ordained that souls should incarnate by way of the union of a man and a woman. We seem here to be touching some fundamental mystery, right at the very heart of things. To think, then, of sex as in itself impure, would appear to be a kind of blasphemy, as though we thought we knew better than our Maker. Certainly, too, sins against purity bring a greater moral disintegration than any other sin. Probably adultery is not, in itself, a greater sin than meanness; and yet, generally speaking, the adulterer is a worse man than the miser. He has sinned against something more basic than economics.

The aspirant certainly feels more perturbed at this kind of distraction than any other. It is not a sin that beautiful physical images, which may be pure as a Greek statue, should occur to him, and he had better not frighten himself by imagining that it is. And yet how wise that he should be on his guard!

The simplest course may be to interrupt meditation altogether for a week or so, trusting that the mood will pass away like a thunderstorm that moves across the sky without breaking. Another

way is to narrow the meditation down, and to think more particularly of Our Lord, and of the details of His Life on earth.

The distractions, however, may signify something more than a reaction after contact with fundamental mysteries. I am assuming, of course, that the aspirant is genuinely seeking God in all sincerity of intention, and is leading a good life. But is he always quite as careful as he should be? I look on God as the inspirer of all noble art, but there are some books and plays which no one can enjoy while pursuing a successful course of meditation. If he is self-indulgent, too, greedy and soft and selfish, he must mend his ways at once. I wish him, too, plenty of outlets for his creative energy and many legitimate objects of affection. I wish a woman to have children, or sick folk or old people to care for, and then I feel she is all right.

Well, Stranger, I hope you have read through these pages with a certain amount of impatience, because none of them applied to *you*!

By the way, I don't in the least agree with what you said about Science being concerned with First Causes. Surely Science only legitimately considers *antecedent* causes, and leaves the Ultimates to Theology and Metaphysics. For instance, meditation may be the antecedent cause of many kinds of states of consciousness, but it is not the *ultimate* cause of spiritual experience. That is why we can

go to Psychology for information about methods of devotion, and how they may be expected to develop the mind; and why we can listen while Psychology classifies states of consciousness. But Psychology can't tell us anything about God.

I admit, however, that when scientists find out, by the way of Science, that the ultimate causes *are* probably spiritual, I begin to be triumphant!



## XI. *From the Stranger to the Author.*

London.

WELL, if I am impatient, *you* are the reverse. Still, it is not always easy to get one's idea over adequately by letter. The most innocent words can, through the absence of the inflection of the voice, appear quite formidable on paper. Whilst conceding that I may be trying to run before I can walk, I am not, however, in a fever of impatience as I apparently gave you to understand.

I consider myself fortunate in being able to open my heart to someone who understands the obstacles to be met with along the way. The Way

of the Cross is the way of light, we are told—but it is difficult, and to the beginner, as well as to the saint, sometimes unpleasantly dark.

I fully realize the impeding effect of hatred, or the reviling against one's circumstances—for that matter. Frankly I do not think that I definitely harbour thoughts of hate towards anybody, although, of course, being human, some people annoy and irritate me. But it seems that my greatest difficulty is in trying to overcome worry and its companion, fear. My profession—except in rare cases—is not one which yields an abundance of wealth, and the pressing problem of "How can I meet that expense?" invariably hold sway in my mind. But I will refrain from waxing eloquent, because I dislike reviling against my niche in the scheme of things, and also because I understand the devitalizing effect of self-pity. Still, I must be honest and admit that I am a victim of this all-too-common worry.

I will explain. I am not ambitious in the sense that I desire wealth, yet to be able to go through life without having to spend overmuch time and precious energy on the necessities of existence would be desirable. I am ambitious, however, to produce something within the scope of my work which is beautiful and helpful. If then I cannot enrich, say, the literature of the world, I desire above all else to possess within myself those virtues

which will encourage and beautify the lives of others. I can remember what it feels like to be "detached": to remain spiritually calm whilst the world of men and things rushes madly by. . . To shed the fragrance of love and peace and hope amongst my fellows—this, indeed, is the pearl of great price; the full and complete life. To see the Divine image in the (sometimes) unprepossessing exteriors of those about me, to interpret as stepping-stones to something higher, the annoyances which beset me—these are the qualities I need and strive to attain.

Psychologists tell us that the state of our body is merely the reflection of the state of our mind. Knowing this to be true, it distresses me to feel slack about, and tired with, my meditations. True, I live the unnatural life decreed by so-called civilization—but not excessively so. London, of course, is not the most ideal place to meditate in; those gardens called old-world would be far more restful, but then I feel that the true mystic should be able to make contact with God anywhere.

I'm afraid that your letter, wonderfully cheering and encouraging as it is, has caught me in one of my off moments, and I am not too proud of exhibiting such a frame of mind, when I really ought to be demonstrating spiritual tenacity. I can at least hide myself behind my signature, and feel grateful that we have never met! Not death

alone, but the ruthless unmasking of our pet weaknesses, makes cowards of us all.

But to revert to your interesting dissertation on difficulties in general, and the intrusion of sex thoughts in particular. May I postulate the theory that the vital force and Divine energy contains within itself—wholly and entirely—the pre-eminent (I am not satisfied with the word “pre-eminent”, but I cannot think of a better) quality of *devotion*, and that it depends upon individual development how we interpret this quality. For example, do you not consider that the sensualist’s love for a woman, and, say, the saint’s love for God are merely different degrees of the same manifestation? Let me take the analogy of the locomotive. The energy which drives it is steam, yet by regulating levers we can make our locomotive move either backwards or forwards. One can go further, and say that it depends on the knowledge and skill whether the driver drives his engine to safety or destruction. Used or abused—it is the same energy, isn’t it?

Wonderful as the Eastern systems of religion are, it is nevertheless generally agreed that the methods of attaining Nirvana are unsuitable; in fact, deleterious, to Westerners. The practice of concentrating upon those nerve centres known as *chakras*, and the awakening of the fiery *kundalini*—by those who do not know the possible

consequences, soon discover that somehow or other their spiritual power is making them sex-maniacs. Again, to some the aroma of incense excites only feelings of the highest devotion; to others it arouses sensual impulses. But enough of this. . .

In one of your letters you said that I had arrived at the third stage of development. Does this correspond to the "third mansion" mentioned by St. Teresa? At the moment I am reading that exhaustive survey of spiritual development, *The Degrees of the Spiritual Life*, by Abbé A. Saudreau, which, of course, you are familiar with. I have not got very far into the book, but I think I can already recognize myself amongst those struggling souls in the Second Mansion. But the certitude with which the author classifies the stages of the soul's progress, and the various types of converts he deals with, is quite wonderful. Certainly the Roman Catholic Church has brought soul-directing up to a fine art!

But now as regards your remarks about those difficulties which may be holding up my advancement: I have read your letter through very carefully and will certainly examine myself in the hope of discovering whether there are any animosities which are playing havoc with me. For the time being, however, I will contain my soul in patience and not be discouraged. I will, too, persevere with

your original form of meditation, and will continue to send you my records. As you see from the enclosed, nothing of any moment has happened since I last wrote.

By the way, I have got Peers' *Studies of the Spanish Mystics*, but will try to borrow the *Mansions*.



## XII. *From the Author to the Stranger.*

Cambridge.

**I**DON'T think I imagined you were as impatient as all that! Only unnecessarily impatient—too impatient for your own peace of mind! But as long as you are persevering undiscouraged, that is all right.

Yes, worries about money may be a very real hindrance. One thing, though, I am quite certain of. It is better to be strict with oneself, and to give up pleasures and comforts, rather than to be worried about money. Peace of mind is worth so much more than wine and cigarettes and magazines and many things that we assume instinctively we can't do without.

All the same, it is better to be poor—not desperately poor, but rather poor!—than very rich. Nothing cuts you off from your fellow-men like wealth. It is not only that everyone treats you differently if you are rich, but you cannot enter into the feelings of half mankind! I hope you can feel that comparative poverty may be worth while.

To turn to another matter. I told you not to be impatient for results of your meditations, but there are some results which are almost inevitable. They happen so gradually and quietly that you may fail to notice them, and be discouraged at your unfruitfulness, when all the while there is a rich harvest awaiting you.

I suppose the most important thing about a man's character is his instinctive judgments. The aim of all education should be to help the child to form right instinctive judgments. He will be too busy as he grows up to stop at every moment and reason out what he believes in religion, what he admires in art, what political leader he can trust, whom he shall choose as a trusted subordinate in business. He is forced again and again to rely on his subconscious mind, which must supply him with quick decisions. Of course I am not suggesting that there is no need for conscious consideration of important matters. No! The conscious mind will be like a committee deliberating a motion, but

the intuition is the chairman who gives the casting-vote.

Now the chief value of meditation is its training of the unconscious. You are perhaps looking about for gold ore on the surface, but the stores of precious metal lie deep down under the soil.

You will find, then, that meditation is affecting all your instinctive judgments and interests. Perhaps you used to admire people because they were powerful and successful. Now you admire them because they are good. You wanted to make acquaintances who would help you in your career or give you a lift up the social hill. Now you find yourself seeking the people who care about the best things. You used to like art that stimulated your nerves and suggested heat, turmoil, noise. Your taste has changed. The art of serenity, wide clear spaces, reverence, hush, eternity, is what appeals to you.

Somehow there seems less friction about life. The matters that irritated you were generally small personal difficulties, affronts and worries. I dare say you were nobly trying to brace yourself to meet them, and making great efforts to be less easily hurt, less vain and full of care. Almost imperceptibly the little gritty irritations have floated away, and do not need to be resisted, because they have become so unimportant that you do not notice them. Someone's irritating air of superiority,

the little mannerisms of another, the weather which is so much worse than the weather used to be twenty years ago, the impertinence and self-assertiveness of the cook, and the big dim fears which haunt us all, fears of accidents, fears of illness, fears of change, fears of loss—well! thank God, our minds dwell in fairer fields now. We have come out of a little stuffy, over-furnished, dusty room into the wide country of God's peace. Will a few weeks' meditation accomplish all this? Yes, and more besides.

The shifting of your chief centre of interest is very noticeable. As William James points out, it is our nature to be keen first on one thing and then another. "Things hot to-day are cold to-morrow", is the way he puts it—not very felicitously, I think, as the remark somehow suggests mutton, which is only too apt to be hot to-day and cold to-morrow. However—! The way children grow up is by means of a succession of enthusiasms. They are not fickle and reprehensible, because their interests alight first on balls, then on flowers, then on bird-eggs, then on stamp-collecting, then on engines and so forth. We progress in the same way, until we discover two things—our special work in the world, and God. There we may rest.

One of the normal results of meditation, then, is the enhanced interest that the aspirant finds in everything to do with religion. He cannot help reading

religious books. Biographies of saints, whether of long ago or to-day, works of devotion, treatises on the psychology of religion, all come into his eager hands. He wants to know what the greatest thinkers and seers have discovered about God. He must know how the lives of good men reflected belief in action. He wishes to know the judgment that scholars pass on the varieties of religious experience. The ordinary business of church-going acquires a new savour. It has so many aspects. Worship of God, communing with fellow-Christians, the steadyng beauty of the sacred building and the liturgy, the intellectual stimulus of sermons, all these are to be found in church. There is a particular savour of loveliness, too, about Early Celebration, when Mother Earth is only just awake, and Nature, the day and the soul are unsullied by the cares and noise of the world.

I know nothing more encouraging than this heightening of interest in all that has to do with God and religion, which we are bound to feel if we persevere in meditation. But to be helped to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, is only part of the achievement. Almost more startling—for after all, the other was only to be expected—is the way in which people become more interesting to us. Every man in his own inner-self sees and knows something which outsiders do not see. He sees some beauty and pathos and worth, which

give him a sense that he *must* be valuable, and that what happens to him really matters very much indeed. He is always a little puzzled and hurt that others are not aware of this. Perhaps when he is in love, and is loved in return, he thinks that he has shared the intimate view of his personality, but if it was so, it was only for a moment; the door swings to again, and the shrine is hidden. Our Lord had always a full view of this shrine. He stood at the core of the personalities of men and women, seeing the beauty and pathos of their souls, fully aware of their value in the eyes of God. There is no need to explain to Him that, in spite of what outsiders think of us, we matter. He knows. There is a spark of God burning in us.

Now as you progress along the Mystic Way you will begin to acquire this admirable insight. After that, I think, you will never be bored again! Our contacts with our fellow-men are generally spoilt by the feeling that there is really no common ground between us, that while we are talking, their eyes are wandering away over our heads, and that they are not really listening to a word we say. They want to talk to us about rubber-restriction and cars and bridge, and we want to talk to them about cancer-research and Egyptology and the League of Nations, and we can't see what they are after, and they don't understand our language, and, oh, dear!

what a bore it all is! But the fact is that we are only different on the surface, and the deeper you get down the more alike people are. Right at the very base of their nature they are trying to keep in touch with God. Some are desperately conscious of this effort, others are only semi-conscious, some have obscured it altogether, but it is there. Our Lord could always get in touch with it. If we keep close to Him we can, as it were, follow Him into the hearts of men. Then, wonderfully, everyone becomes interesting and lovable. We lose our sense of superiority and patronage, if we had it. We do not wish so much to "do them good" as to love them, as if they were our brothers and our children. And we *care*, we care most tremendously what happens to them.

Come, Stranger, aren't we getting on a little! Another delightful thing that happened to me as the result of meditation was getting acquainted with my guardian angel. Now I have no definite beliefs about guardian angels. You may take the expression as purely symbolic, if you like. What I call my "guardian angel" is what the Quakers call the Inward Light. Some people say the voice of conscience. Socrates referred to his *daimon*. The Old Testament chroniclers assert that it was the Lord Himself who spoke to Moses and the prophets. I like to imagine to myself that I have a friendly companion in the unseen world who is

interested in my progress, and I hope that when my spirit is freed from the body I shall be allowed the privilege of playing guardian angel to some mortal still on this earth. It is, I think, the kind of work I should most enjoy.

Be this as it may, the important thing is that you become aware of a force, a monition, a power, guiding your life. When you reach out into the darkness and ask for guidance, something—someone—answers. At first you may not be quite sure whether you hear the inward voice correctly, but after a little practice, its tones are unmistakable. You may not like what it says, for it quite often orders you to attempt a difficult task, but the directions are perfectly clear, and if you disobey you forfeit your peace of mind. When you do get into the way of walking alongside this unseen companion, you gain a wonderful sense of security and peace. Some say that he whom we thus dimly apprehend is Our Lord Himself. I do not know.

I can tell you one thing, though. When my guardian angel gives an order, he always provides the means for carrying it out. My own schemes fall through at least nine times out of ten, but the plans of my guardian angel are invariably successful. I will give you a couple of instances. I had been studying Mysticism and the Psychology of Religion in a desultory way for some time, when, in 1915, my guardian angel commanded me to give

some lectures on Spiritual Exercises. I firmly replied that the thing was impossible. No one would give me a lecture-room, no one would come and listen to me, I knew next to nothing of the subject, and so on. However, my guardian angel said I had better go and see Professor C. S. Myers, then professor of Psychology at Cambridge. I did so. He received me as though his mind had been prepared beforehand to be specially courteous to me. He put a room at my disposal, and gave me every encouragement. I did my best with the lectures. I suppose it was my guardian angel who sent the audience. Anyhow, the course was a complete success. I repeated it afterwards, and finally published the lectures in book-form. And it was this book, *Spiritual Exercises*, which put me in touch, dear Stranger, with you.

This is the other instance. A friend of mine needed a job very badly indeed, really exceedingly badly. She had been staying with us for a month, and was beginning to feel she would rather not stay any longer. I had written round frantically to all sorts of people asking about jobs, and had taken the steps one usually does take to find employment for an applicant. No result. One evening I was meditating, alone, in the dark, and not thinking at all about my poor friend, when I heard my guardian angel say: "Really, Aelfrida, I am ashamed of you! All this fuss and worry. You ought

to know better. Instead of writing all these unnecessary letters, and bothering your acquaintances to no purpose, why don't you *listen?*" I listened. Presently I became aware that a Stranger-friend—one who, like you, had written to me for advice—had a job to offer of just the kind needed. I wrote to her the following morning. She replied that my letter came as an answer to prayer. (Dear me! this raises the whole question of answers to prayer, which I have been shirking!) The end of the story is that my friend is now happily at work, and the two women have been of the very greatest help and comfort to each other. My guardian angel managed it all so neatly that I was charmed.

I wish you, then, dear Stranger, all these excellent results from your meditations, and from the efforts that you are making to live a Christ-like life. To judge from your letter, you are well on the way towards obtaining them.

Your question about "stages" must be answered very briefly. These classifications are only approximate, of course. The Roman Catholic writers always seem to me impossibly exact and meticulous and well-informed. My own rough classification follows that of Henri Delacroix (*Etudes d'Histoire et de Psychologie du Mysticisme*). The third stage is one of oscillations between light and darkness, "sensible devotion" and "aridity", until stable equilibrium is reached. I don't want you, though,

to try to "place" yourself too definitely. If you are to be a pioneer, you will want something of the spirit of adventure to lead you off the beaten track. If I talked about "stages", I only wanted to convince you that you had already made some definite progress.

This letter is too long, or I would answer what you say about sex. Since you are a man, I feel tempted to defer to your superior knowledge, but you seem to tend a tiny bit towards the opinions held by Professor Leuba, who thinks all religion is perverted sex-instinct, and I can't possibly agree with *that*! Nor would you, I think.

By the by, will you some time give me the titles of books that you have found particularly helpful. Shall I do the same?



### XIII. *From the Stranger to the Author.*

London.

I FEEL like an entomologist who, making a stealthy approach towards some lovely and much-prized butterfly, is fearful lest the long-sought-after beauty will again escape the security of his net. . . .

Forgive this outburst, but the simile is apt! My

meditations last night must have touched a pleasant chord, for I am feeling strangely elated. I feel that I am approaching something lovely, yet am fearful lest it should escape me. Indeed, I am almost apprehensive of writing about it, for fear that even before I have posted this letter to you, it will have eluded me. Never mind, though.

A person who from fast fleeting enlightenment *knows* certain truths, yet is unable to demonstrate them, is apt to revile himself for his momentary lapse in confiding his weaknesses to another. Now I censure myself for chattering about the instability of my finances, because I realize that everything you say regarding this vexed question is absolutely correct; as are also your remarks about the subtle change which can take place in the mechanism of one's inner vision.

*“Two men looked out from prison bars:  
One saw mud; the other, stars.”*

I can imagine nothing more calculated to encourage the would-be mystic than to hear of the personal experiences of those who listen to the “Still, small voice”. Your two cases were interesting and helpful, and I, too, look forward to the time when I can relate similar instances to you. As you will see, my meditation record is uneventful enough, but I am not one whit discouraged.

The mention of your “guardian angel” sent a

mass of conflicting ideas through my mind, and I straightway wanted to sit down and write to you. The keynote of my jumbled thoughts would have been one of protest. I visualized you as one of that growing band who claim to be in touch with a "Master of Wisdom"—a relationship (or attachment, rather) I have never been able to understand or tolerate. But upon reflection, I decided that you were, after all, quite harmless! Seriously though: my original ideas on this matter of intermediaries have never left me, despite the fact that I know people who regard themselves as *chēlas* to entities whom they are pleased to call their own masters. In fact, it is *because* I know of such cases that I have rigidly adhered to my original ideas. Now I wish above all things to be perfectly fair in my judgments, but the attitude of these people is intolerant, unrestful and altogether repellent. More than this: their doctrines appear to me to be distinctly anti-Christians. In essence, they are against the Divine Plan, whether it be Christ's or Buddha's or Mohammed's teaching. In a word, there is something subversive, unhealthy in their tenets. . . . Do I sound bigoted? Really, I ought not to be, for I have studied and listened to so many and diverse points of view; and have long since come to realize that all constructive religions are points of view of Deity.

You can doubtless understand then, how relieved I was when you identified your "guardian angel" with the Voice of God. Your explanation just made all the difference.

In these days of stimulated activity in psychical matters, it cannot, I think, be stressed too forcibly upon people how dangerous is the practice of sitting in passive *and negative* quietude—thus making themselves an easy prey to undesirable astral entities which claim to be this or that great intelligence. Fearsome maladies of the mind invariably follow; and the last state of these unfortunate people is worse than the first. Knowing what I do, I've always tried to steer clear of such influences.

*Later.* I was unable to finish this yesterday. If this reply is somewhat fulsome, then I hope you'll understand, but there are still one or two points I want to mention, and I may as well bombard you with them in one salvo. Regarding the sex question. I am unaware of Professor Leuba's existence—let alone his theories, but I certainly cannot ally myself with him. No! He apparently places the sex impulse first, and religion as merely incidental: an unhealthy viewpoint. For my part, I would rather say that sex-instinct is the lowest manifestation of religion—yet even this interpretation is wholly inadequate. In any case, the word "perversion" is too unsavoury to use.

I do not find it so easy to give you a list of those books which have helped me; for all, within their particular capacity, have done so. As you already know, I have been a voracious reader and when you found me I believe that I was suffering from indigestion. Works on Occultism, Mysticism, Psychology, and a dozen different "religions", including the Eastern systems—such was my literary fare. In the main I found it pleasant enough: it was interesting to compare my own views with those advanced. But if this course of reading did not give me the inner peace I sought, it certainly gave me a fairly good all-round knowledge, which is of course, quite useless as a passport to Heaven!

Anyhow, here is my list. I include Fiction purposely:

*The New Testament* in Modern language—  
Weymouth's translation.

*The Supersensual Life.*

*The Practice of the Presence of God.*

*The Cloud of Unknowing.*

*Towards Democracy.*

*The Bhagavad Gita.*

*In Tune with the Infinite.*

*Raja Yoga.*

*The Making of a Mystic.*

*A Little Road-Book for Mystics.*

All the novels of Algernon Blackwood, especially *The Education of Uncle Paul* and *A Prisoner in Fairyland*. And *Fraulein Schmidt and Mr. Anstruther*, by the author of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*. (These three novels are amazingly exhilarating, and have helped me more than I can say.)

One final point. You will observe that I am not meditating at the prescribed hours, nor am I regular. This has been caused through business and social calls. Do you mind?



#### XIV. *From the Author to the Stranger.*

Cambridge.

YOU really must not apologize for revealing your weaknesses to me! What would you think of a patient who said to his doctor: "I don't know *what* you will think of me, but I am afraid I have a headache," or "I hardly like to mention the fact that my temperature is 101°"? I want you to tell me all your difficulties, however trivial they may seem to you. Remember that I

am not free from sins and troubles myself, any more than doctors are immune from illness. Since no one is, or has ever been, sinless, save Christ alone, I am bound to know, in a general way, that you have weaknesses and troubles—it is only a question of your giving me a little detailed information about what they are. I look on imperfections as so many goads to urge us on towards God. So please do not mind telling me about them.

Perhaps the term “guardian angel” which I used in my last letter, is too definite. A conception of an Inward Light may be less open to objection. I do most earnestly agree with you in feeling impatience with people who—probably to compensate an inferiority complex—arrogate to themselves a right to communicate with “the Master”, and strut about wrapped in a ridiculous mantle of so-called occult knowledge. I dislike the adept-pride and the sacerdotal-pride intensely. The fruits of adeptship seem to be credulity, vainglory, self-assertion and want of common-sense—anything more different from the fruits of the Spirit can hardly be imagined. Anyone who claims to have more knowledge of the spiritual world, and more guidance in life than his Christian charwoman or bootblack, is probably self-deluded. The experience I am talking about, the sense of being directed by a higher power, is

one which thousands of simple Christians have known. It is the reward not of magical ceremonies and mental gymnastics, but of dedicating one's life and thoughts to Christ. I have met it among people of all classes. The first man who ever spoke to me about it was an old gardener of ours. If you have ever heard the story of how, in the Great War, Jerusalem was surrendered without a shot being fired to damage the holy city, you will guess that Lord Allenby is one who follows the Inward Light.

I am not, however, dogmatizing as to *how* the guidance comes—discarnate spirits *may* be the intermediaries. I am only certain of the *whence*. The ultimate provenance is God.

Of course I am not asserting that all impulses to action should be blindly accepted! Every call should be examined by reason, and submitted to the standard and test of Jesus Christ.

At times there do seem to come suggestions from outside of a type very different to those which would be given by a guardian angel. As you say, if the mind is purely passive and negative, there may be a danger of these. I remember a man once telling me a notable thing. He was at that time proprietor of a newspaper which was competing against various other papers in the district. One day he was sitting in his office reflecting on the fortunes of his paper, when quite suddenly there

came to him, as it were from outside, a suggestion of how he could take advantage of his rivals, and put his own paper in a secure position. The action would be mean, but not positively illegal, and he could carry it out without fear of detection. For a minute or two he was overwhelmed by the force and attractiveness of evil. Then he prayed, and it seemed as if the room was freed from a diabolical presence. Very likely if he had yielded, he would have become a rich man, but not, certainly, a happy one.

The whole question, I think, of Spiritualism, is a difficult one. I am always surprised, though, when people seem to want to make a *religion* out of Spiritualism. Suppose we had found a way to commune easily and constantly with the spirits of the dead, I cannot see that we should want Christianity any the less. I should still need saving from my sins, and still need to worship God and rest in Him. I am quite willing to take a future life on trust, and I am so sure its conditions are different from anything that my finite mind can possibly imagine, that I would rather not strain my intelligence by trying to understand what the dead may attempt to tell me about it. Further, I am convinced that, when our dear ones leave us, they are only hindered in their progress if we cling to them and call them back to consider our grief and our striving. There was

a great deal of reasonable philosophy in the old epitaph :

*"Since her cannot come to we  
Us must go along o' she,"*

and we are much better employed in fitting ourselves for eternity and learning to "think spiritually" than in clamouring for the attention of the dead. If God in His wisdom chooses to set glorified spirits to guide and help us, well. But we can at least leave the matter in His hands.

I see no reason, all the same, why Spiritualism should not be approached from the scientific point of view. Communication with the dead is as much the proper sphere of Science as communication with Australia, and if trained scientists feel called on to investigate its problems, why, let them! No harm can ever come of considering any question with calm and unprejudiced intellectual interest. It would be a good thing, however, to leave the matter to the scientists. Hysterical widows listening raptly while mediums report second-hand platitudes from the other world; weak-headed women fancying themselves adepts controlled by dead buddhas and mahatmas, these can only make Spiritualism ridiculous, and bring genuine investigation into disrepute. Personally I believe that under certain circumstances communication between the living and the dead is quite possible,

and has taken place, but I do not number this opinion among my religious beliefs. It is a religious belief that Our Lord said: "Where I am, there shall ye be also," and that is infinitely more important.

Now as to further results of meditation, which you may as well be looking out for. Everyone has, I suppose, what used to be called a "besetting sin". It may be something quite trifling, but it is amazingly difficult to overcome. Perhaps I am one of those people who always like to be the centre of attention. When I am in company I am restless and uneasy unless I am definitely established as the most vivid and attractive person there. I am quite aware of this weakness of mine, and despise myself for it. I resolve that nothing on earth shall induce me to make such a fool of myself again. And yet, not once, but many times, I forget to be on the watch, and, somehow or other, I succumb.

Your temptation may be quite different. Perhaps a sense of secret dissatisfaction at good fortune coming to men whom you dislike, perhaps envy of their success. You may have got a sharp temper or a habit of grumbling. Whatever the enemy is, it seems tediously and inevitably to get the better of you. Well, meditation does help most enormously here. The mere fact that you have remained quietly in the Presence of God for a short

time every day has made you better, without effort on your part. Your prayers are like a sun-cure which heals while the patient is at rest. In the intense spiritual experience known as "conversion", desperate and hardened sinners have often found themselves suddenly healed of old and long-standing diseases of the soul. The results of quieter religious experiences may not be as dramatic, but they are every bit as valuable and satisfactory.

Now I find, and I dare say you are finding, too, that when I am in the middle of a course of meditation, I feel all the time a kind of serene elation, as if my inmost mind were suffused with a soft radiance of light. Even when I am busy about other things, I know it persists in my subconscious mind, and I can, as it were, dip my hand down into it, and feel the warmth and joy of it. I remember, when I was engaged to be married, I bore with me a wilder secret joy, but in somewhat the same way. This particular feeling is quite independent of external circumstances. I have experienced it in bereavement, in physical pain, in circumstances that were vaguely depressing and boring and yet not bad enough to evoke the reaction of courage. One is conscious of the rightness at the heart of things, in spite of the wrongness on the surface. I think the "elation" you mention in your record of meditation, is the beginning of this experience. Hold it fast, for it is very precious.

It happens before you have got very far on in your career, that other people begin to come to you for help. It is amazing how soon they find out anyone who is in touch with God! Just as when a man comes into a fortune, he is besieged with applicants for charity, so when a man has inherited spiritual riches, his friends begin to ask how they may get their share. I wonder whether you have noticed, too, what a wonderfully valuable event this is. Someone asks you for advice and guidance. At first you feel you do not know. His plight, however, arouses your compassion, and you think you will give him what you have, little as it may be. You suggest and explain, and as you do so you are amazed at the extent of your knowledge and the strength of your conviction. You have been stimulated by another's need to discover a treasure-house of whose very existence you were ignorant. Amazing!

It may be that in this way you discover your vocation. I do not mean that you suddenly find out you want to be a missionary or to take orders. Who would deliver our groceries and write our newspapers for us if everyone went into the ministry? What I mean is that you will see in a flash the particular kind of individual that God meant you to be, and have a clear and luminous ideal to which you can conform. This is very cheering. Half your troubles come from not

knowing exactly what God expects of you, and what you have a right to expect of yourself. If you are wanted to be scullion in the king's palace, you need not weary yourself with intriguing to be grand vizier. If you ought to be grand vizier, you must give up messing about among the pots and pans. To see a clear issue, to hear a definite command—how eminently desirable!

Well, Stranger, I haven't, as usual, answered your last letter fully. If you are not already acquainted with Professor Leuba, I will not trouble to introduce you—he can wait. And I will write to you about books another time.

I am not fully satisfied with your record of meditation. When you say, for instance, "May 15. 11.30 p.m. Nothing happened—as far as I know," I feel that there *must* have been more in it than that. What were you doing all the time? You must have been thinking about something. If your mind was too busy or too tired for receptive stillness to be possible, were you not taking some definite religious thought—such as, for instance, the sinlessness of Our Lord, or the power of the Holy Spirit—and allowing your mind to deal quietly with it? I don't believe in trying to make one's mind a blank, and hoping inspiration will come from somewhere. It helps some people to think of other aspirants meditating at the same time—there are always devout souls waiting upon

God!—and to put themselves in touch with them. My trouble generally is that I get too many impressions and ideas, and find difficulty in sorting them out into any kind of order afterwards. I don't think one should expect always to experience a describable state of spiritual consciousness, but religious thoughts of some kind one surely has.

What about the *action* side of the question? Contemplation without action is an anomaly. Or, if you prefer the expression, faith without works is dead.

To answer your last question. Regular times for meditation are convenient, and make concentration easier, but, of course, they are not essential. We aren't doing magic!

P.S. I enclose a specimen record of meditations from my MS. collection, for you to compare with yours. Yours was not nearly full enough.

*May 7. 10 p.m.* Concentration excellent. Feel I have gained much in knowledge of God since I last meditated. Sense of infinite goodness *drawing* me towards it, then that it is round me everywhere, that I inbreathe it. Consciousness of almost physical lightness, finally merged in loss of self-consciousness as I contemplate the infinite beauty of God. Very difficult to leave off meditating.

*May 8. 10 p.m.* All day long I have felt extraordinarily happy, and came to my meditations as eagerly as a lover to the tryst. First of all I saw pictures—meadows of buttercups surrounded by trees laden with flowers, chestnuts, hawthorn; sea and white cliffs in dazzling sunshine; austere mountains, first grey, then snow-covered. . . Everywhere the Spirit of God trying to realize itself in beauty, pushing its way through matter to express perfect loveliness. Presently I became aware of people—here and there in isolated cottages, then in villages, finally in crowded towns, consciously or unconsciously, but all busily and driven by an unseen compulsion, seeking God. The whole creation travailing and seeking Him. Suddenly a lonely Figure, watching, in some such picture fashion, all the Kingdoms of the Earth spread out before Him, and the Devil of temptation standing by Him. I understood something that I had never understood before. Then Jesus stepping down into the suffering of the world, accepting, loving. So, through Him, I came into contact with God, and forgot myself altogether.

*May 9. 7.30 a.m.* Felt the refreshment of meeting with Spirit that is absolutely pure and untainted. Drew in the radiance and freshness, of which early morning and spring sunshine seem a fitting symbol.

10 p.m. Communion with God, infinitely peaceful and radiant, without images or forms. Perfect stillness.

May 11. 10.20 p.m. The sensation, very familiar, of being just a point with infinite depths of star beyond star above, below and around me. Silence everywhere. Strange that the perception of this infinite peace and stillness should have *moral* value and give one strength to be good! I am conscious of being in communion with the source not only of all goodness, but of all artistic inspiration. The life—the infinite life—in those stillnesses—glorious!

May 12. 10 p.m. Did not intend to meditate, but found myself thinking intently about *preparation for the Sabbath*, and felt waves of peace and happiness come flowing in from to-morrow. I have always loved the Sunday hush, especially in the country. I know Sunday isn't intrinsically different from other days, but it has a different flavour!

May 15. 10 p.m. Entered at once into the peace of God. His Presence apprehended as *light*. I felt it not only *around* me, stretching out through wide luminous spaces into infinite distances, but penetrating the very depths of my being. I thought

of all humanity, and prayed that every one might feel themselves penetrated by His being. I said: "I remember, for those who forget." The light was so great that I could not look (though, of course my eyes were shut, and it was dark in my room), but when after a while I "looked" again, there was a great cross in the foreground, the symbolism of which I immediately apprehended.

*May 16. 7.30 a.m.* I felt a strange half-fear at coming into the Presence of God, because of my sins. (Many people think too highly of me, mistaking for goodness what is merely interest in religion.) Then I was conscious, while *awe* persisted, of relief that God knows me as I am, and that there can be no question of "keeping up appearances". So I worshipped, and rested in Him.

*May 16. 10.10 p.m.* To spend fifteen or twenty minutes, or whatever it is, most vividly conscious of God's Presence, is enough for me, but the mere statement of fact does not seem record enough of so intense an experience. I try to put down a description of the form under which I apprehend Him. The most correct seems to be "a sphere of infinite consciousness". I am aware of His infinity. He is not, at these times, King or Judge, even Father suggests something too

anthropomorphic. He is infinite Spirit—not a void infinity, but an infinity tense with life, which I definitely feel to be full of justice and benevolence and purpose. I can't see *how* infinity can be beautiful and moral, but so it is. I *can* see, though, how it is that I am filled with awe, and how I become so small that my consciousness of self vanishes for a time. It is harder to understand *why* steeping oneself in this timeless, spaceless *something* should make ordinary life more rich and put joy and courage and compassion into one's heart. I am glad, though, that I can't *define* God. My mind can meet Him, but can't walk all round Him!

*May 17. 7.20 a.m.* Very stupid and sleepy. Offered myself to God with all my sleepiness and stupidity. Got up feeling exceedingly happy.

*10 p.m.* Since this is Ascension Day, I meditated on Christ ascended and glorified, repeating "O Jesus Christ, I adore Thee". I had a vision of Him, rather far off and high above me, wearing His white seamless robe. I tried to see His face, but it was too bright for me to look on. As I adored Him, I understood how my knowledge of God and all my ideas about goodness had come to me through Him, that I am always referring my judgments to Him as my standard. I was

simultaneously conscious of God in the same spaceless was as before.

*May 18. 10 p.m.* Strange meditation. I thought I would complete my meditation on the Trinity, so I repeated "O Holy Spirit, I adore Thee". I was conscious of the Holy Spirit as it were *lifting* the world and presenting it to God the Father. I felt it working in and through mankind, shepherding the human race towards a destination not fully understood. I was in touch with all people. But whereas when I commune with God the Father I enter a realm where there is no evil, here there *was* evil battling with the Holy Spirit. It was very disturbing, and I could not meditate for long.

*May 19. 6 a.m.* Waking early, I reflected long on my meditation of the previous night. At 7.20 I was asleep again!

*10.20 p.m.* After a very difficult and agitating day I tried to meditate on the Holy Trinity, but found it too hard. My mind wandered off into theological speculations, and my head ached. So I meditated as usual, "O Infinite God, I adore Thee", and was at once lifted up in ecstasy, a *peaceful* ecstasy. Afterwards I longed so much to make everyone know the same peace and joy that I felt impatient. Why *don't* they try!

*May 20. 5.30 a.m.* Meditated on my experience (indescribable) of last night.

*10 p.m.* Thought I could not meditate at all, but tried and passed at once into contemplation. Felt amazingly calmed and braced after resting in the Presence of God. Before I had felt like a river rushing over rocks, all churned up—then like a river flowing in great calm width to the sea.

*May 21. 5 a.m.* Thought about the *steady*ing effect of meditation.

*10.20 p.m.* Meditated on the Holy Spirit in preparation for Whit-Sunday. Felt Him working in and through the hearts of men.

*May 22. 7.30 a.m.* Reflected on last night's meditation. Conscious of the Sun of Righteousness dawning on a troubled world, and the Holy Spirit bringing men to Christ.

*10.15 p.m.* Meditated on the Holy Spirit and how He is working to bring mankind to a unity through various stages. Watched good struggling with evil and being equally inventive.

*May 23. 5.30 a.m.* Continued the meditation of the previous evening. There seems now to be a kind of uninterrupted thread of meditations, continuing in my subconscious mind all the time, giving a sense of quiet elation.

10 p.m. The meditation merged into a symbolic day-dream. The Divine Artificer was there, attempting to build a magnificent cathedral. However, the various stones, etc., declared that they wanted to "realize their own personalities" and, instead of doing His bidding, refused to co-operate. Some of the stones had little wings and flew off in all directions, others rolled away and lay inertly. Finally a few became reasonable and allowed the Artificer to put them in place—then others flew and poised themselves—it was really most entertaining to watch them!—but the cathedral remained incomplete.

*May 24. 5.45 a.m.* Adored the Infinite God and felt Him showering down spiritual light on all who are able to receive it. I like this meditation best, though sometimes the sensation is so intensely joyful that I have to desist.

10.10 p.m. During day I find myself unconsciously beginning meditation. Reflected on the need of *action* as outcome of thought and feeling.

*May 25. 5 a.m.* Continued last night's meditation at some length.

10.5 p.m. Felt a wonderful rhythm moving between Heaven and earth—the Holy Spirit, as it were, raising mankind up towards God, and God giving back inspiration to goodness and beauty.

Perpetual life and virtue being sent forth from God and returning to Him.

*May 26. 5.45 a.m.* Meditated on the *beauty* of holiness. The best kind of goodness is never harsh and unbeautiful.

*10 p.m.* Thought I was too tired to meditate, but tried, and found myself at once lifted above all emotions and preoccupations into the timeless serenity of God.

*May 27. 10.15 p.m.* Thought chiefly of all the queer things—such as speed—which interest a lot of people more than religion. Why?

*May 28. 7 a.m.* Invoked the Holy Spirit and prayed for blessings on all holiday-makers. Prayed for the souls of any who might die suddenly by accidents, and tried, as it were, to hold peace ready for them.

*10.30 p.m.* I had been out in the country all day, so I adored God as revealed in the beauty of Nature. I lamented my own dullness and grossness, for I only very dimly apprehend.

*May 29. 6.30 a.m.* Was given two marvellous dreams of ecstasy. This shows that meditation is influencing the unconscious. Meditated on the dreams. Felt that I could no more separate myself

from God than waves can cut themselves off from the sea. They toss and fret, and deep down the ocean is calm.

10.30 p.m. Apprehended the Infinite God as light showered down upon my soul.

May 30. 7.30 a.m. Fantastically imagined the country-side as a prayer-carpet, on which I knelt to offer myself to God.

10.15 p.m. My guardian angel said I had better change the method of my meditation because the feeling of elation and "sensible devotion" which accompanies me all day is, to a certain extent, selfish. He said I was to place myself in the midst of a succession of groups of people who have special trials to bear, imagine their difficulties, and then, as it were, offer these people to the Holy Spirit. I obeyed, and began with *miners*. It made meditation less agreeable but, I hope, more profitable.

May 31. 6.30 a.m. Continued last night's meditation and found it most interesting.

10.30 p.m. Same, considering English people living abroad. After a while I found myself praying for Russia, always an agitating subject.

June 1. 7.25 a.m. Returned to the earlier meditation, adoring the Infinite God and resting in Him without thought or consideration.

10.15 p.m. Meditation for people in pain.  
Intense feeling and sense of God's presence.

June 2. 10.20 p.m. Thought about the Holy Trinity. Surely "aspects" would be more correct than "persons". Three aspects of the One God. God Transcendent. God perfectly apprehended and "mediated" by a human being, who was therefore fully able to be the Divine inherent in Himself. God Immanent, working in and through Nature. I followed many trains of thought about the Trinity, but found it more satisfying to adore the Mystery which, after all, transcends thought.

June 8. 10.20 p.m. Resumed meditations. Found myself at once *lifted up*, as it were, to join the Heavenly Host. Indescribable! These spiritual beings were certainly praising God, but it was not exactly by *song*—perhaps "unheard melodies" best expresses it. They were rejoicing with a wonderful joy and exhilaration in the beauty of God's goodness. I joined in, but *how* I cannot tell you. Afterwards I said to myself: "What silly questions some people ask! Fancy saying *where* are the dead—because spirits exist in a state where there *isn't* any 'where'," (which sounds silly, too, as I put it!).



XV. *From the Stranger to the Author.*

London.

HOW pleasant and kind your letter was: doubtless I thought this because I expected a whacking! Firstly, I cannot be wholly responsible for the contents of this letter, for I only managed to get about three hours' sleep last night, owing to the incessant aching of a tooth, so I'm not feeling too alert to-night. I shall, too, probably tell you things I shall regret!

Of late things haven't appeared very easy with me—both inwardly and outwardly, and I fear the weak clay of which I am made has been inclined to tremble, nay, almost crack under the strain.

I will try to tell you all my troubles. The spiritual ones may be comparatively easy, but the material conflicts will make me feel uncomfortable, because I hate anything in the nature of bemoaning my fate and exposing my very little worth to this big world! Still, so much of my distress emanates from my business that I really cannot omit to tell you a fragment of the trouble.

You'll find enclosed the beginning of a letter which I started to write to you—it seems—aeons ago.

Well now. My efforts to hear God have been shamelessly weak and untrusting. Twice have I

really tried to speak to God, to tell Him how utterly wretched I am, how faithless, but, oh, how (in my better moments) *burning* to be quickened for His Service. The first is reported (enclosed). The second time was the other night. We had been given some stalls for Covent Garden, and they were playing *Turandot*—Puccini's last opera—and, knowing bits of it, I was delighted to be going to hear it. But it so happened that I got the idea that I would like my wife to take a Swiss friend of ours who has always been very kind, and who, I thought, would enjoy a glimpse of London's season. So I begged her to go. . . . I was therefore alone, and meant to write to you. I think I started, but destroyed it! Alone, therefore, I tried to pray—in the very orthodox verbal fashion. But, alas! I felt no comfort. I know that it may be wrong to want or expect comfort: it is not that which worries me so much; I only want to feel that the strength to plough this lonely furrow is mine, that I have got the *will* to go on praising God *because it is a barren affair*. How much, indeed, do I mean the words when I say “Without Thee I perish!”?

Whatever, at any time, you feel disposed to tell me about myself will always (I think) encourage me. Not because I like to be spoken about, but because it *does* help if (say) a cold, critical mind examines my more than complex state of impotence

and can see that out of the ashes of lost hopes and memories something a little fine may emerge. One day, of course, I, with the commonest and deepest-dyed sinner, will emerge a splendid son of God; but if you can see fairly immediate signs for encouragement, then, as I say, any words of yours will help. I will, too, be brave enough to hear your hard criticisms as well!

. . . This extra work is a depressing affair—not so much because it is extra work. It would do no good, I suppose, even if I did attempt to describe the chaotic and impossible conditions under which I work. It seems that any little thing which is calculated to upset and discourage is done. . . But I must stop this.

Do you remember me saying in the past that I felt spiritually and physically tired and impotent? This describes my state. It's radically, terribly wrong, of course.

Believe me, I do not revile God. Somehow or other it's my own fault. The essence of my present work is insincerity. If, then, I say that I am as unhappy in work as a fairly conscientious person can be, I do not speak extravagantly. I want, even to put the matter at its *lowest*, to find God so that I may be able to work well—however difficult or inimical the conditions, praising Him for enabling me to see and feel Him amidst uncongenial surroundings. Even a more substantial

remuneration would not lessen the difficulties, for I realize that money--although horribly necessary—is not the thing which makes one's private life or business life happy. It is the fruition of an inward urge to produce something fine, something lovely, which yields happiness.

But enough. I've been grumbling disgracefully, haven't I?—but you ought to be told everything if it helps you in your diagnosis.

Something, so it appears to my blind eyes, is radically wrong with me somewhere. Let me, in conclusion, quote Aelfrida Tillyard:

*“If, however, the mystic remains convinced that he is on the right road, the terrors of the darkness will not overcome him.”*  
(p. 97, *A Little Road-Book for Mystics.*)

Well, am I on the right road? I do not know. I gather all my conflicting emotions and thoughts and impulses into a lump and say, like the little lady in *Romance*, “I want to be good!”—and I still seem to fail.

This open confession deals, I'm sorry to note, at greater length with the material than with the spiritual side of my make-up. But I realize that if I get my inner world in order the outer world will readjust itself.

It is late, and I must stop. Just one final word. Is it helpful or harmful for me to visualize myself

as I desire to be: without malice, full of love, calm under the most terrifying and difficult circumstances? In a word, meditating on myself as a more or less perfect being, as God intended us all to be. Will you tell me your views?

Good night. Tell me, why did we meet? I hope that, when "peace" is achieved, ours may be a long and happy friendship. . .

### *The Unfinished Letter.*

What, indeed, is wrong with my meditations? I still experience no satisfaction or sense of tranquillity after sitting quiet. *Au contraire!* Doubtless I have a lot of lost ground to recover, but, if I am to be perfectly honest, I must say that I find the work both difficult and irksome.

It is only right that you should know this. I misunderstood your instructions when you said: "Put yourself in God's Presence and say slowly 'I adore Thee, O Infinite God'; then wait. Listen." I interpreted them to mean: inhibit all thought, put your mind in a receptive state. Think of nothing, but wait patiently and expectantly. . .

By the way, can you, at will, get into touch with your "Guardian Angel"; can you, at will, ask questions and receive enlightenment?

Here is another confession. I am not dedicating my work. This omission is, I think, caused by

forgetfulness more than by anything else; and this, in turn, is doubtless occasioned by the lack of results in my meditations. I am both disappointed and disgusted with myself.

I understand your remarks about besetting sins, but, if one takes a broad view of the matter, are not all the fallings-short from perfection—all the sins of humanity—caused by cutting ourselves adrift from the beneficent Spirit of God?

*Later.* I have just spent forty-five minutes trying to still my mind and to meditate on Christ's Spirituality, but I feel no better for it. Oh, to be able to smash down this barrier which separates me from that which I seek! Altogether I am a most unsatisfactory sort of person.



## XVI. *From the Author to the Stranger.*

In a field, somewhere between  
Horningsea and Clayhithe.

I AM sitting with my back against an ivy-covered tree, looking out over a hayfield all sunny, and I am trying to write to you with a sixpenny fountain-pen—so I rather wonder whether my thoughts will ever find their way to the paper!

Your last letter. For some unaccountable reason you were ashamed of it. Why on earth didn't you write it to me weeks ago? One of my very first impressions of you was of a man working at tasks he disliked. When I asked you whether your work was congenial you said *yes*. When I asked you whether you felt "hatred"—qualifying the word a bit afterwards—of anyone you said *no*—only a little unimportant irritation. And this, I suppose, simply because you were trying to be brave. But how can your doctor prescribe for you if you merely dole out little bits of the truth, a scrap at a time? As for your being ashamed to tell me things—my dear Stranger, you simply don't know what I have to listen to sometimes! I don't think anything could shock me except the deliberate (mind you, not the weak) choice of the filthy instead of the clean, and that, mercifully, is extraordinarily rare.

I am sorry your work is what it is. Since you have a very strong artistic conscience, at least one side of your nature would always feel bitterness and irritation at having to do "lowbrow" literary work, even if your inmost soul had found peace. (Incidentally, that seems to be one of the mistakes you persist in making, and that is why I asked you when you first had the idea of coaxing things out of God. You appear to imagine that because you are trying to be good, you ought to receive at God's hands a kind of beautiful, protective armour which

would prevent your suffering. No. Peace in your soul you will have, but freedom from suffering, never.)

. . . At that point the fountain-pen gave out. Now I am at home again—and resume.

Well, I write these pages with the greatest reluctance. I want to try, if I can, to explain to you what I believe your “vocation” to be. I would much rather you found it out for yourself, but, as you don’t seem to be able to command the necessary quiet and leisure for a good, hard *think*, perhaps it is better you should be told.

People who take their inner life seriously can be divided into two classes. There are those who can and do, to a great extent, isolate themselves and their problems. They make an “interior castle”, fortify themselves therein, and generally bring order out of chaos in a pretty short time. Seeing very clearly what is right, they can carry it out with a certain ruthlessness and unconcern. Their personal difficulties are not complicated by overmuch sensitiveness to other people or to the spirit of the age in which they live. Of course, I did not know him myself, but I always fancied Mr. Gladstone was a man of that type. Anyhow, with his rock-hewn profile, he looked it!

The other type is the man whose personality is not only *himself* but his friends and his times,

too. His turmoil is the turmoil of circumstances and of things as they are; he is beaten on by all the winds of the sorrows and desires of the men and women round him. He may respond by being a philanthropist or a poet or something quite different, but he will never be able to go on quite calmly towards some goal that he has set himself and leave other people to do the same. Again, I may be wrong, but I think of Canon Sheppard as a man of this stamp. If you put him by the side of Gladstone he looks quite small. Impulsive, a little frail and pathetic, too fond of talking about himself and his own feelings—without the grace of the Holy Spirit he would have been an unheroic figure. And yet, having given himself and all his weakness unreservedly to God, he is a man of the most enormous spiritual influence. A broadcast sermon of his brings him in about a thousand letters from strangers. As Vicar, he was just as accessible to the poor and outcast who gather in the crypt of St. Martin-in-the-Fields as he is to the King himself—as far as his strength would allow, and beyond it, he has been responsive to people's troubles and showed them how to find God. But when you hear his rather thin voice, and detect the lack of any note of self-confidence in his sermons, you feel that he has spiritual value not because he is strong when other men are weak, but because their weakness is, as it

were, a part of his nature and that all humanity suffering and thirsting for God is an extension of his personality. If he got rid of his weakness he would lose all his influence. The world doesn't want "Superior Beings" and cocksure theologians; it wants men who are troubled with its troubles and *yet* believe in God.

Now do you begin to see what I am trying to convey? Your ideal for yourself seems to me rather topsy-turvy. You would like to see yourself strong and serene and courageous, able to pursue a right course without flinching, and quite impervious to outside worries. You can do better than that. Just look back for a little over your spiritual career and see whether you have any indications whatsoever that God wishes you to turn into such a person. I see none. Of course, there is something to be said for the proposition that a man must solve his own problems before he can help other people with theirs, but I do not think it is invariably true. You are naturally so sympathetic and responsive that you *are* partly other people, and to try to isolate yourself and your difficulties is to create an impossibly artificial situation.

On the other hand, you certainly have had hints that your relationship to other personalities and to your age is a particularly close one. You remember that during the War you said you felt

you exercised a protective influence over your comrades? The unrest at which you chafe is not your own private possession, it is a diffused unrest, broadcast over modern Society. That is why I tell you that you may expect inward peace, right deep down in your heart, but that if you demand freedom from pain it can only be at the price of insensibility. My dear Stranger, I hate having to tell you, but I honestly believe it to be the truth.

It is very important that you should succeed and be a mystic of the kind God intends you to be. As I see it, the human race appears to be progressing by way of increased sensitiveness of its members one with another. Nothing in history is more amazing than the callousness of one race, one class to another. The most virtuous Jews cared very little what became of the Gentiles; quite pious American gentlemen thought slavery an excellent institution; Catholics and Protestants could endure to see each other suffer. God was imagined as blissfully happy while the damned agonized in hell—the damned who were His children. In reality the Incarnation explained that God is part of suffering humanity. And those men who are most truly called to follow Christ are those who are in touch with the travail of their generation and who can vibrate in response to its pain.

Of course, I do not know whether you have reached this stage yet. I think you have. You have had your time of intense religious experience and a long stretch of aridity. Can you begin now to worship God, not for yourself alone but for your generation, and to listen, not for some private and intimate message to be delivered to you, but for something that would be applicable to dozens of men in circumstances similar to yours? If you feel you are rather an ordinary and commonplace sort of person, not worthy, etc., etc., all the better. Suppose a very original and unusual mystic says: "I have had such and such an experience and to me God spake these words," the obvious retort the public makes is: "Of course —we can quite understand such a thing happening to *you*—but that doesn't help *us*."

No. I don't want to turn you into a popular preacher or a writer of half-crown theology, but if you can solve your problems you are blazing a trail for men like you—and there are many—to follow, and so to solve theirs.



XVII. *From the Stranger to the Author.*

London.

HERE am I, within an hour almost of receiving yours, already answering. It was kind of you to write at such length. It isn't at all kind of *me* to say that it has thoroughly depressed me—but it has, for some inexplicable reason. It isn't because you foresee a difficult life for me: God knows that I never have (I believe) wanted an easy life. Rather, like Philip Brooks I say, “Do not pray for easy lives, but pray for *strength* to meet life's difficulties.” I know I sound pretty desperate, but I must find peace somehow.

Your comparisons of the two types, i.e., Gladstone and Sheppard, are not quite clear. I take it that I am of the latter mould—one who has to do a bit of burdening myself?—but why are you so reluctant to tell me about my vocation? Somehow I have always felt that I had to help people; but what I want to know is this: am I never to feel that peace and strength in my soul for which I crave? There is one thing in life more difficult than carrying the burdens of others with peace and strength within one, and that is carrying the burdens of others without peace and strength within one. . . .

Am I to take it that you see no immediate change for the better, that I am not the "type" that is destined to enjoy those wonders which the writer of those records, for example, experiences during meditations?

I cannot quite agree that if I *do* visualize myself as strong and courageous and serene that I can do better. I won't do this if you say so, but a courageous, etc., etc., being need not necessarily be unsympathetic or unloving. The ideal, to my mind, is one with all these qualities, plus an aptitude of feeling the World's heart beat. Surely the ideal man of God must be like that—so strong his faith and so devout his soul. . . . But this explanation is incomplete: I could far rather talk than write.

I find difficulty in writing all the things I want to say—so they must go. . . .



### XVIII. *From the Author to the Stranger.*

Cambridge.

YOU must not, my dear Stranger, make my task too difficult. Do you think that in this correspondence all the difficulty is on your side and that it costs me nothing to try and help you? Much of the letter which you found

lacking in warmth and encouragement was written when I could hardly see the papers for tears. You must remember that you are my spiritual child, and assume all that the relationship implies. Will you do so—to your comfort—in the future?

I am sorry I was not quite clear. I often live with thoughts for a long time and make such familiar companions of them that I forget they may seem strange to others when I bring them out. Perhaps in this case I can make my meaning clearest by setting you a spiritual exercise and leaving you to find out in practice what it is all about. And this time you must *persevere*.

During the War there was killed on the Italian Front a young soldier called Giosuè Borsi, who left behind him certain journals telling how he progressed in the knowledge of God. They were, of course, not intended for any eye but his own, and some people think it was sacrilege to publish them. However, they are very wonderful. They show with admirable clearness the two poles between which the mystic's life naturally moves: one the secret communion of his soul, in loneliness, with God; the other his identification of himself with suffering humanity. Borsi said, "If I can save myself I can save the whole world," an amazing and, some might think, almost blasphemous utterance—but the book bears the R. C. *imprimatur*. What the young soldier meant was

this: "My problems are the problems which all men of my generation have to solve. If I can reach God, they can". Everyone who climbs the heights lifts humanity a little higher.

Now you see, my dear son, if you visualize yourself as strong and courageous and serene, and see no further, you are, in a way, limiting God's providence. How *can* I make it clear? See! you hold a cup out to God and say "Fill this." He fills it—and that's that. But what is needed is a pipe or channel of grace. *You* used to think of yourself as at best handing the cup round as a loving-cup. All the same, the water-pipe would be better.

Besides, you are still asking for God's gifts, and not God Himself. I used to do just the same. I used to read about the visions of the saints and say to myself, "Oh, if I could but experience these delights I should ask for nothing more." I did experience them. Then I wrote and told my director about it. He replied by return of post, "I am not in the least interested. The question is, can you now look on yourself as 'that Tillyard woman'?" I was most deeply hurt and, to tell the truth, thought him both vulgar and unsympathetic. (How naughty of me!) He was, nevertheless, perfectly right. Spiritual sweetness and consolation, however glorious, however wonderful, is but the dust in the balance compared

with the humblest act of self-sacrifice or love. The discipline of the will required in considering myself from a detached point of view was infinitely more valuable than exaltation and ecstasy. There is, though, a quiet and hidden shining of the Inner Light which comes, I think, only after suffering, that has no dangers and which is infinitely precious.

To return to the spiritual exercise. Please say to yourself that a very large proportion of men in England to-day are in your position. They are not as well treated by their superiors as they ought to be, and little encouragement is given to them to do their best. They cannot shake themselves completely free from anxiety about money. They have little leisure and few congenial friends. They find life sometimes exciting and sometimes boring, but always rather an effort and a puzzle. Many of them have given up all hope of getting any help at all from religion. Their unrest is affecting you at this very minute. But you have not given up hope. Like Borsi, if you can save yourself, you will save all these others, too.

At the office, when all the wheels seem to have grit in them, say to yourself, "I am going to oil these wheels with forbearance and patience and order, not for my own sake, but for the sake of the men here and all the men in all the offices in England." When you read beautiful books

and hear noble music, do it in the same spirit. If you feel you can meditate, offer to God the worship of all men, and especially of those who forget Him. You are not "carrying the burdens of others"; you are realizing that your burdens and theirs are the same.

"Am I ever to feel that peace?" you ask. Of course. His promises are sure. What one cannot be certain of is exactly how He will speak to you. As to whether you are destined to "experience wonders" I haven't the slightest idea. Nor do I very much care.

Your vocation. I thought all my last letter was about your vocation. If you want me to be more definite, you are going to produce really good books. By good, I mean good literature. When you write your newspaper articles you have the most vile and pretentious style. I know it is perfectly adequate, but I detest it all the same. When, however, you are really moved, your emotion forges its own weapon, and I get quite excited over your possibilities. It is perfectly clear, and you can probably see it for yourself, that a quick end to all your difficulties, and an easy and cheerful life, would lose to the world one writer of importance. Only, since all great works of art are written, so to speak, in their author's blood, one feels a little reluctant at seeing one's friends set out to produce literature. I have watched several

men shirk it because they could not face the pain that genuine writing involves. It is so easy to get a facility and a knack, and to learn to save one's self! I don't know whether you have got the courage to be an artist, but all the necessary elements are there. Don't be in a hurry, that is all. You would produce something terribly chaotic if you started a *magnus opus* now.

Now be strong and of a good courage. Half your depression is just wanting a holiday, and must not be taken too seriously.



## XIX. *From the Stranger to the Author.*

London.

HOW grateful I ought to be, having found someone to guide me! What short memories the majority of people have: they forget the hours when they have begged for a certain thing to happen *when* their wish has been fulfilled. I used to say: "It's all very well for people to say that at the psychological moment the teacher comes along the path. . . Why don't

I meet someone? I suppose it's only in mystical India that such things happen!" And here it has come to pass!

Anyhow, many many thanks for your last letter, and the one before that, too. Your last was certainly more explicit than the former, although perhaps my understanding was not functioning when I received the other?

It helped, but I refuse to be excited over what you have to say about my vocation. May it simply happen!

Please note: I have stopped "hankering" after signs and wonders.

By the way, I would like you some time to give me a list of books which you think might help me. More especially would I like the titles of the experiences of *modern* mystics. For example, isn't there rather a wonderful autobiography of one of the Tagores? There is Marie Lataste, too. Otherwise, I am keeping off deeper books, and instead fancy (strangely enough) fiction. By the way, have you ever read *Episodes Before Thirty* (autobiography), by Algernon Blackwood? I should like to lend it to you if you haven't—because I am convinced that you would enjoy it. Do you know any of his novels? *The Education of Uncle Paul*, *A Prisoner in Fairyland*, and *The Human Chord*—to mention but three.

I am trying the exercise you set me, and am

praying particularly that I may *remember* to remember those who are struggling. I omit to ask for blessings—save that I shall know God and do His Will. Is that right?

Good night. The sky over this London of ours is a liquid green. Come to our little town garden and see it! How mysteriously beautiful night really is. I love it, especially in the Mediterranean, where the stars seem so low that one could almost pluck them!

Do you know Henry Vaughan's *Night*. Listen to these three verses:

*"Dear Night! this world's defeat;  
The stop to busy fools; care's check and  
curb;  
The day of spirits; my soul's calm retreat  
Which none disturb!  
Christ's progress, and His prayer-time;  
The hours to which high Heaven doth  
chime.*

*"God's silent, searching flight;  
When my Lord's head is filled with dew, and  
all  
His locks are wet with clear drops of night;  
His still, soft call;  
His knocking time; the soul's dumb watch,  
When spirits their fair kindred catch.*

*“There is in God—some say—*

*A deep, but dazzling darkness; as men here  
Say it is late and dusky, because they  
See not all clear.*

*O for that Night! where I in Him  
Might live invisible and dim!”*

Isn't it lovely? Again, good night to you!



## XX. *From the Author to the Stranger.*

Cambridge.

**N**OW that we are agreed on your “vocation” and are quite clear in our minds that you have to solve your problems not only for your own sake, but for the sake of thousands of men who are in situations similar to your own, I feel that we are going to make real progress. The immediate question which now faces us is *Pain*. I am not here referring to physical pain, but to the suffering of the soul in its quest for God. You have just been through, and perhaps have not yet thoroughly emerged from, a period of “aridity” which hurt considerably. Was it necessary? Has it been of any use?

I want to begin with a plea that we may not be too much fettered by the past. The whole of the science of the biology of souls seems to me to be dominated by antiquated theological ideas. I don't want to go against important experience or undervalue what generations have found valuable, but—well! moderation in all things. I am quite clear in my own mind that the type of character which is needed nowadays is not the type which, for instance, St. Paul had to try to produce when martyrdom was a likely consummation to a Christian life. After the Reformation, Catholics had to turn out Christians suitable for being killed by Protestants, and Protestants had to manufacture Christians strong enough to be sent to the stake by Catholics; but nowadays, except in China and Russia, capacity to die for your faith is not often wanted, and to spend all your life cultivating it, is like turning the whole of your country into an armed camp in time of peace.

However, the teachings and conceptions of Christ are never out of date, and that is why we are quite safe in invoking the idea of the Fatherhood of God to help us solve the question of pain. Of course this conception has hardly come into its own yet, because of the preposterous ideas of Fatherhood which have been current for generations. Some of the Puritans, for instance, flogged and bullied their children, to gratify the father's sense

of power quite as much as to save the children's souls, and they naturally thought of God as doing likewise. Nowadays we admire a father who glories in seeing his children live a free and full life of their own, but who has no hesitation in inflicting pain when he knows that it is necessary. The pain he wishes to spare them is pain which comes from ill-health, from the unkindness of others, from the domination of their own passions, and from faulty adjustment to environment. He does not wish them to have a soft life, because that would deprive them of one of the purest of all joys, the instinctive delight in overcoming difficulties; but he does want them to be happy.

I suppose the old idea that the human race was divided into two parts, one of which was going to be miserable in this world and happy in the next, and the other which was enjoying itself gorgeously now, and would pay for it by eternal torment hereafter, is slowly dying out. It found superb expression in such books as *The Pilgrim's Progress* and hymns like "Jerusalem, my happy home", but the majority of people now simply ignore it. If the religious life is a mixture of renunciation, tempered by "comfort", with all real joy postponed till after death, they have no use for it. And we are all growing so sensitive to other people's pain that we know perfectly well we could have no pleasure in Heaven, if even the worst of sinners

were being tormented eternally. (If you want to know, do I believe in hell? Yes, and no. No, because if God would rather the sinner turned from his wickedness and lived, I can't conceive of the sinner's will being ultimately stronger than God's. Yes, because some men seem to be so wrapped up in material things that they will surely be desperately bored in a purely spiritual environment, and an eternity of having no taste for the joys that surround you would be a pretty bad torment. However, the greatest of sinners is not vile all through, and any trace of capacity for spiritual things must serve as a starting-point for education.)

To return from my digression. People are not going nowadays to bear pain willingly in order that they may escape pain later. To do so would seem an inferior kind of morality at best. Pain now, bringing joy hereafter—no; we don't care for the idea. Unless, of course, pain is making us better and more spiritual now, and, incidentally, more fit for joy hereafter. There would be some sense in that.

To think of life as an education for eternity is an old conception, but quite a good one. One wants to change one's ideas of education. The old ideas of education was that it was necessarily disagreeable. As Dr. Johnson said: "The boy hates his Latin. You show him the stick. He gets his

lesson—and there's an end on't." In the past the whole of childhood was overshadowed by exactions and restrictions which made it a time as much of terror as of delight (and then very often the child never lived to grow up). Bertrand Russell (who is not so very old) tells how at the age of five he wept bitterly because he was told that childhood was the happiest time of life, and he felt it was already intolerable. The modern idea is that growing-up should be a much pleasanter, more spontaneous affair. Surely this is also the case with growing-up spiritually.

Isn't it a sin of *lèse-majesté* to God to assume that learning to live close to Him must necessarily be so grim and painful?

I do think then that about ninety per cent. of the pain you feel in trying to be a mystic, and to be continuously conscious of the spiritual world, might have been avoided—oh, no, not by you, but by the men and women who brought you up, and by the more remote people who made the world you live in. Look what a pull Quaker children have! They are taught the art of silent meditation, very often before they are taught to read. The habit of guiding their steps by the Inward Light comes absolutely natural to many of them. (Sometimes when they are grown-up they even become slightly superior, because they can't quite understand why other people find it so difficult—and

that is a pity.) Why aren't all children taught to listen to God? But don't torment yourself by thinking the fault is yours, if now you are not as quick a learner as you would like to be; and have patience with others who are slower than you.

A great deal of suffering comes from the world not being the right kind of place for being good in. Tasks should be difficult, but not too difficult. When we are saints we shall be able to triumph over all difficulties; but when we are only saints in the making, the noise and bustle of the world, the want of appreciation and seriousness on the part of our friends, vague anxieties and torments, make real spirituality very hard. Don't you want passionately to bring to birth a world in which it will be easier to be good? I do. That is where it is such a relief to one's feelings to do a little practical philanthropy, if one can—to clothe and house people, not just that they may be clothed and housed, but that they may have leisure to look up and see the stars.

However, when all is said and done, I think it is better to share the common lot. God never wanted His children to be miserable, and the road to Him to be beset with so many snares, but, since it is so, it is a pity to reach one's goal too easily. If you could, as a lady expressed herself to William James, "cuddle up to God whenever she wanted

to", you would not, I think, ever become particularly valuable spiritually.

A good deal of the pain, then, ought not to have been necessary. All the same, it has done you an enormous amount of good.

In the first place, merely having been through it without losing faith is extraordinarily valuable. I remember, when I was quite young, and very, very happy, saying to myself, how can I know that my trust in God is worth anything, since it has not been tested. Afterwards, when I thought all my earthly happiness had crumbled into ruins, and I found I could still love God and praise Him, I did feel a triumph and an exhilaration surpassing any experience I had ever known before. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" was not a murmur of resignation, but a song.

Another thing. A result of the period of depression through which you have passed—and which the old writers call "passive purgation"—is that you are beginning to attach less importance to the *emotions*. You realize that you may be in just as healthy a state spiritually when you do not feel fervour as when you do. Your *will* is stronger, you are more fitted to persevere.

I think I said some time ago that you might look forward to an inner serenity, but not to an absence from pain. Was that quite clear? The inward peace comes from your will being united to

the will of God, the pain from an ever-increasing sensitiveness to the difficulties of others. Just this kind of sensitiveness and awareness *must* exist in many people before the world can become a better place to be good in.

Tell me, will you, whether you find your own difficulties easier to face now that you are considering them as shared with many others.



XXI. *From the Same to the Same.*\*

Cambridge.

I HAVE not yet answered your questions about books. I wish there *were* more books of modern religious autobiography; or of biography that were not merely concerned with outward circumstances. If the most ordinary Christian, given only a fair gift of self-expression, would towards the end of his life sit down and quietly write out the story of his spiritual experiences, and trace the guidance of God in his pilgrimage, what a collection of valuable books we should have! How vastly more important

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\* Sent before the answer to the previous letter was received.

than all those terrible memoirs of generals and society ladies who tell you what the viceroy said when he missed his first tiger, and the noise Queen Victoria made in sipping her soup.

You read the *Journal* of Stephen Grellet, did you not? Do you know the *Journals* of John Woolman and Thomas Ellwood? A Quaker library will give you a good selection of intimate religious journals.

Have I recommended the *Autobiography of Sœur Thérèse de l'Enfant Jesus*—by way of contrast? She was born at Alençon—I have seen the house of her parents; and prayed in the cathedral where she was wont to worship—in 1873, and died at the Carmelite Convent, Lisieux, twenty-three years later. Being the child of a man who wanted to be a monk, and of a woman who ardently wished to become a nun, and who had only married on the advice of their confessors, it was to be expected that she should have a natural genius for piety. All her sisters became nuns. Her brothers died, the mother rejoicing that the little flowers were transplanted to bloom early in the Heavenly garden. Thérèse herself was like a blossom that had drifted to earth by mistake. She never wanted to play, never cared for the world, never dreamed of a sweetheart. For all that, she had a strong sense of humour, a great deal of common-sense and an indomitable will. I often

wonder what she would have been like if she had not deliberately modelled her character on the mediæval Roman Catholic plan, and had not so exclusively cultivated a particular type of saintliness. There seems no doubt that she *was* a saint, and thousands of people have admired the beauty of the holiness she achieved. I should like to know what you think of her!

I expect you know the *Life of Sadhu Sundar Singh*, by Canon Streeter and Dr. A. Y. Appasamy. Sundar Singh sought peace by way of Hindu mysticism, and failed to find it. He was converted by a vision of the Jesus whom he had despised. Afterwards he devoted himself absolutely to his Master, and travelled about preaching Christianity. He combined the ideals of the Hindu and of the Christian mystic. His soul seems to have lived without effort—though not without physical cost—in those high regions to which all great religions point. He interests me chiefly for his amazing freedom of the spiritual world. Where most men grope and falter, he runs and soars. Reading his words, one feels that he holds the door of Heaven open, and who wills may enter in.

You will think I have been reading little but Indian books, for two autobiographies which I also recommend are by Indians: one by Maharshi Devendranath Tagore (father of Rabindranath), and the other, *Fifty Years' Pilgrimage of a Convert*,

by Dewan Bahadur A. S. Appasamy (father of Sundar Singh's biographer).

Devandranath's story is the account of how he extricated himself from superstition and formalism, seeking a purely spiritual religion. He is noble and grave and dignified, and passionately in earnest. You find him gifted from the beginning with correct intuitions, and his quest is always for the highest. Appasamy, on the other hand, began with having to acquire some of the elementary virtues—honesty, for instance, which seems to be extremely rare among Babu lawyers. He had naïve ambitions to be a man of property, to educate his sons in the style of English gentlemen, while he himself cut a dash as a Zamindar.

“I purchased an original type of carriage,” he writes, “with a top somewhat like that of an ornamental palanquin, but exceptionally beautiful. When harnessed with my cream-coloured horses the turn-out presented a very stylish appearance. I had occasion to purchase a saree worth a thousand rupees, but on the very first Sunday on which my wife wore it for church the clergyman there happened to preach against luxury and frivolity in dress, so she refused to wear it any longer. Articles of luxury, for which I had no use before—like gold and silver jewels and vessels, guns, revolvers, daggers, and other things which I acquired—involved me in a considerable departure from

the original simplicity with which I started life."

Before he reached old age, however, he became dissatisfied with a life of mere worldly integrity. Giving away the majority of his possessions, he devoted all his energies to "living at peace with God". He seems to have changed all his standards of what was desirable, and to have shed his former ambitions as easily as one lays aside an outworn garment. There is no mistaking the genuineness of his tone. Most certainly he found peace.

So much for the books, dear Stranger. I hope some of them will be to your taste. Good-bye for to-day.



## XXII. *From the Stranger to the Author.*

London.

YOUR last two letters deserve an answer; but I have refrained from replying because I have wanted to be in a position to tell you what big strides I have made towards my ideal. No such intelligence can I give you—but I have no regrets. I imagine my progress—in fact, most people's—to be slow; and in the main, uneventful,

if I may use such a word. In my spiritual quest I have always been impressed by the fact that, after numerous and divers meanderings, I return to a definite starting-point. I am there now. I see, as it were (albeit very hazily), a road stretching before me: it is the *devotional* road which leads to the goal; and (so it appears to me) is trodden through the application of the Will. Yet, paradoxically enough, there must be no "willing to be". With youth's waywardness I have taken the other roads, sampling "other" ways of getting to God, but they were obviously circular, as I now am where I started! The mystic's road may be both sunny and shady, but it is direct. Despite its almost heartbreaking difficulties, it is amazingly unfettered by "complications". Above all, it is safe.

With all my knowledge, I am now beginning to recapture the prayer of my early youth. It is the simplest form—verbal; and is not cumbersome in its length or expression. I ask, however, a tremendous thing—that I may do the Will of God; that my foolish and hindering will may be submerged in His. That's all. I desire many things, of course: for example, that I may love Him so heartily that my heart may be so "aflame with God" that *everything* I do may be a sacrament. . .

Thomas Traherne, in his *Meditations*, not only asked, but answered a question in my mind. "Wouldst thou love God alone?" he asks. "God

alone cannot be beloved" is his answer. . . "He must be loved in all with an illimitable love, even in all His doings, in all His friends, in all His creatures". So that in this business of setting out to love Him, one does it, as it were, indirectly, through bestowing our love on all created things.

This brings me to another vital point. That of taking upon myself the trials and sufferings of others. I see your viewpoint perfectly, but I am one of Nature's most forgetful children, and in the heat and stress of my own particular worries and troubles, I forget to bear them with as great a spiritual dignity as I could wish. But, God willing, it will come. Yes, I will say that I *do* find my difficulties easier to bear, for some obscure reason. Perhaps, in some small degree, I am *unconsciously* pulling my weight in the boat!

To answer another question of yours: I have read the Journals of both Grellet and Woolman, but not Thomas Ellwood. The *Autobiography of Sœur Thérèse de l'Enfant Jesus* shall be noted for future reference, as will also the others you mention. Thank you for letting me have the titles.

This letter does not seem at all interesting, especially after yours; but that is doubtless because any progress I may be making is of the kind that

does not demonstrate itself in wondrous visions or *apports* or other things. Do I ask for them? No, not now. If I say, "Thy Will be done", then I must be consistent. All I now want is to be of some real use to a weary world—but how, I do not know. Good night!

\*

XXIII. *From the Author to the Stranger.*

Cambridge.

**Y**OU are certainly beginning to "find yourself" now, and I have hopes that a great deal of the counsel that I have been saving up to bestow on you as occasion demanded, may never be required at all. Which would be a most excellent thing.

I don't agree with you, though, when you say that you always find yourself back at your starting-point. Someone has called the mystic's road "the spiral way", and that expresses it exactly. Perhaps you come back to the same side of the mountain whence your journey began, but you are on a path a good deal higher up. Now, if you raise your head, you may find a steep flight of steps going

straight up, and may not need to follow the curve all round the hillside and back again.

Yours is certainly the *way of devotion*. It is a path that suits the majority of men, if they would but recognize it. I wonder why so many people—men more than women—are so afraid of being devout. It may be that they are afraid the beginning of enthusiasm means the end of criticism, and that once they begin to adore, their intellectual powers will be in abeyance. The danger certainly exists, but is easily avoided if recognized. What you want to do is to adore the highest and best that you know, and at the same time to keep the light of criticism perpetually playing on your conception of God, and so always stimulating you to a nobler understanding of reality. The God I adored ten years ago would not seem to me altogether worthy of homage now. Ten years hence I hope for better knowledge still. Yet it is the lavish outpouring of devotion that makes for progress, quite as much as the exercise of the guiding intellect. Have I succeeded in making myself clear?

And then devotion gives one such a glorious sense of freedom, of moving in wide, sunlit spaces, of having pinions to one's soul. Everybody at some time or other feels hedged in, and tied round, and shut down, and prisoned, and suffocated. Life seems nothing but limitations—limitations of circumstances, limitations of one's own strength and

capacities, limitations in other people. You can't express what you feel, and, if you could, your friends would be too busy to give you more than half their attention, and, if they did listen, they wouldn't understand. Nature, beautiful indeed, is callous and unresponsive. Your nearest and dearest seem standing far off on the other side of impassable gulfs. If, then, you can kneel and worship God, how amazing is the sense of liberation! You may send out the whole force of your being in an unbroken stream of adoration, and feel serene like a mighty river flowing unchecked towards the sea. It is so amazingly simple, and so potent, just to say, "O Infinite God, I adore Thee"—asking for nothing in return.

But, as you say, it doesn't do to adore God, merely when you happen to feel in the mood. I suppose that is one reason why people are afraid of devotion. A man finds himself alone at night, when the stars are out, or listening to music in a cathedral, and he can't help adoring God; but the next day he has to make appointments with his dentist and pay the plumber's bill, and the fine feelings have all evaporated, or, worse still, come to appear as faintly ridiculous. Then he needs the discipline of the will. Regular daily meditation, however brief. Church-going. The Sacraments. Reading. Keeping his temper, omitting to grumble, paying his taxes, all for the love of God. If you

can achieve this you will find that adoration persists all the while in your subconscious mind, and the next time the exalted mood returns to you, God has come a little nearer to receive your worship. When you really become expert, you will be conscious of an inner song of praise murmuring all the time in the silence of your heart.

May I just add a little bit taken from a letter written to me the other day by my autocratic Stranger-friend, one of whose experiences I quoted to you some time back?

“ . . . I should have written to you before, and, indeed, have often thought of doing so, but I have really not had much to tell you of my spiritual life since my experience at . . . I have been at peace these past few months. Life has been like a deep, still pool within, and the troubles of official life have not disturbed that inward peace. I still meditate at special times, but I seem to be meditating *always*. I seem one with God, somehow. I find Him in every leaf and every dewdrop and every cloud and every hill, just as though they were sacramental (I suppose they are), and I am full of love. I don’t mean I am more demonstrative towards individuals, but I am so full of ecstatic love for God that I cannot contain it, and I love everybody, and even everything, such as animals, and Nature. . . .”

Perhaps this quotation answers your comment on a phrase of Traherne's which you seem to me to misunderstand a little. You say "in this business of setting out to love Him, one does it, as it were, indirectly, through bestowing our love on all created things". Surely we do it *both* ways—loving Nature and our fellow-men in the right way, we lift our love to Him; loving God supremely, we shower down our love again on created things. A perpetual action and interaction. Don't you agree?

Now you say that you are forgetful, and that you find it hard to remember that you are to take on yourself the trials and sufferings of others, and solve your own problems in the light of theirs. Well, my dear Stranger, you just mustn't forget! Or, at least, when you do forget, give yourself a good scolding, and command yourself to remember hereafter. You are like a child in some things, you know, and you have a child's capacity for imaginative sympathy and delicate perception of pain in others, when your attention is called to a particular trouble. What I want you to cultivate is a feeling that you *must* learn to live close to God in your difficult modern surroundings, because, if you can, dozens of other men can do so, too, and it's up to you to show them the way.

Dear me, Stranger, don't call this a "weary world"! You annoy me. It is not a soft world, nor an easy world, nor a world for the spiritually

lazy, but it is a most tremendously alive and busy and entralling and important world. Here we may be fixing our tastes and choosing our direction for all eternity. That is one reason why I feel that it is so supremely worth while bestirring ourselves to adore God. We don't need to wait till we have settled our theological difficulties or overcome our temptations, or found our particular place in life. I am so glad you are quite sure you have to walk by the way of devotion. Adore Him—and the world won't seem half so weary, and all the problems will bustle round and settle themselves!



#### XXIV. *From the Stranger to the Author.*

London.

HOW badly I express myself! *Apropos* Traherne: I really meant that to love God anthropomorphically appeared to me to be insufficient. That God, being omnipresent, could not be focused to any given spot; that, in fine, the *truest* way to love Him was to bestow love upon all created things—"for there is He to be found".

The secret of all spiritual development is in making contact with our Divine source, and, of course, I have not been doing this unceasingly for a long time. It is a horrible feeling—knowing, on the one hand, that such contact is vitally necessary; whilst, on the other, feeling impotent to set about it. This lassitude demonstrates a weakness in the fibre; nevertheless, knowing the pain it creates I shall always be tolerant towards those who are passing through such a phase.

And yet to me the mere repetition of words thoughtlessly uttered is just as unright as doing nothing at all. It is the depth of feeling with which we invest the words of our prayers that really counts. I imagine mystics of all ages advocate this. I at least know two: Madame Guyon and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Says the latter:

*And therefore it is written, that short prayer pierceth Heaven. . . . Shalt thou do with this little word God. Fill thy Spirit with the ghostly meaning of it without any special regard to any of His works. . . .*

Matt. vi. 7-8 is worth bearing in mind, too.

My own prayers at the present time may not be so brief as this, but I am filled with devotion when I commune. Fearful of tripping up upon this

renewal of my journey, I ask that I might be shown what thing separates me from God. Secondly—which is the most important by far—I pray that my own personal will might be absorbed in His. And, lastly, I ask for no consolations. I think that even you will agree that I am ambitious in my devotions: may I have the will to keep to the path!

Whilst recently in the country resting I experienced, on two occasions, feelings of inner elation. They were reminiscent of my very early days about which I once wrote to you, and they afforded me intense delight. They cannot vie with your correspondent's descriptions, or with my own early experiences when—it seemed—men walked like gods, and Nature was, as Emerson—I think—puts it “too thin a screen to hide the glory of the One”. But I am deeply grateful for having been permitted to experience them. . . . When the aftermath of such moments comes *then* is the testing-time for one's powers of devotion.

I have so often tried, quite dispassionately, to compare myself and my interior workings with those mystics who have enjoyed spiritual sweet-nesses, and have come to feel that I shall (D.V.) in all probability receive them in the form of devotional surgings within, and not in seeing visions or hearing celestial voices. This observation is merely made “by the way”, and should not be construed

to imply that I dwelt upon such thoughts.

Here is my promise: I will take a "grip of myself" and remember to endure the trials and sufferings of others.

Your remarks about my resembling a child are couched too subtly! Am I child-like or childish? You need not feel obliged to answer. Suffice it to say, there is nobody more painfully aware of my shortcomings than myself. It may not be comfortable, but it certainly prevents one from harbouring false ideas about oneself. I do agree with you heartily, though, about the supreme "worthwhileness" of bestirring ourselves to adore God. Whilst my knowledge and experience of the spiritual world may be *nil*, yet something has always told me (even in my weakest moments) that the development of the spiritual life is, through functioning in a material world, God's aim for each one of us. Did I ever tell you that I was once very nearly going to be a parson? Very strong pressure was brought to bear upon me, but the proposition fell through, ostensibly because of financial difficulties. I'm sorry that I annoy you, but I plead ignorance, because I cannot remember having said in my last letter that this was a weary world. Bear with me. One day I shall, I hope, arrive at the stage when I shall be annoyed with myself for having made such a libellous and totally inaccurate statement!

XXV. *From the Author to the Stranger.*

Cambridge.

I THINK you are quite right, and the religious experience to which you may look forward will probably take the form of a welling-up of inner springs of devotion. (How inevitably one has recourse to all manner of metaphors in order to try to describe the ineffable! Still, I expect you know what I mean.) It does not seem to me, though, that you can expect yet awhile to be able to experience this continuously. A perpetual conscious serenity belongs to the "unitive life", and you have hardly reached that stage yet—though you have made very great strides since I first met you, and you asked me the way. There is absolutely no reason for being dejected if you cannot always draw a draught from the well of living water (that of which Our Lord spoke to the woman of Samaria). If you feel lazy and tired at your prayers, lacking the "depth of feeling" you refer to, you must be patient with yourself.

You ask me whether you are childish or child-like. Is it possible to draw an absolutely hard and fast line between the two? *Childish*, in a certain impatient petulance, as if you thought God could make you grow to spiritual manhood by some miracle. *Childish*, to think that you would find

life so much easier if you *were* grown-up. *Childish*, to think that the spiritually-adult are much wiser than they are, and that they can tell you secrets which you can, as a matter of fact, only find out for yourself by long years of experience. *Childlike*, though, because you have not wholly forgotten God whence you came, and are much less involved in material things than the majority of grown-up men. There is a freshness and an enthusiasm in your way of approaching religion which I like enormously. When you are "good", and near to God, you do enjoy it with a childlike ecstasy of delight. Like all real children, too, you have not given up expecting something new and wonderful to be waiting for you, still asleep in the mists of the future. As for a kind of gentle persistence which you possess, I am not sure whether it is *childish* or *childlike*, reprehensible or commendable! However, Christ told us we should be heard for our much asking, so please ask for the right things—as you are certainly now doing—and persist!

I wonder whether it would help you to have a definite picture in your mind of the kind of character you wish to aim at. In any given stage in the world's history there seems to be a definite type of man who can serve his generation better than any other type could. What is wanted just now? (If I try to put down my ideas I hope you won't think

I am writing something in the style of *Home Chat* articles on "The Kind of Women Men Like", "Do Business Men make the best Husbands?" and so forth. Well, well. You know me pretty well now, and you can laugh at me if you like!)

There was a time, I suppose, when you either definitely served Christ or "the world". If you were a Christian at all, you were bound to be hated by those who were not. Up to a certain point, of course, that must always be true. If a Christian finds himself among men who drink and gamble, and make love to each other's wives, and who do not care who goes without the good things of this world as long as they get more than they need, he is bound to make himself unpopular. Even if he says nothing at all, his mere presence will inevitably make the licentious feel uncomfortable. There exists nowadays, however, on a scale previously unknown, a large body of men and women whose ethical standards are unconsciously Christian, but who have no conscious religion at all. Some of them try to put Art or Philanthropy or everyday honesty and decency in the place of religion. Many of them build a noble superstructure of compassion and virtue on despair—despair that God can ever be found and known. Others merely try to stifle their restlessness and drown the clamour of their souls by all the modern devices for distracting the

attention and filling up time. They imagine, one would infer, that if they have a car that goes fast enough, they can get away from their own real selves and their desire for God. The most amazing thing about these men and women, though, is the accuracy of their judgment, when they are criticizing “good” people. They know *they* haven’t found God, but they can tell in a moment whether the God you worship is true or false. You won’t need to explain to them what your God is like. If He is the true God, one day they will come and kneel beside you.

May I (with apologies to William Law) draw a portrait or two, just to show particularly what is *not* wanted nowadays, and so clear the ground a little.

*Julia* is the widow of a clergyman; and the fact that she is now less considered than she used to be, has mighty soured her temper. Garrulous as she is, her conversation does but consist of variations on three main themes. (1) That the world is not as good as it used to be. (2) That the members of the church which she attends are the most ill-bred, inconsiderate, prejudiced, conceited and cantankerous collection of men and women that you could possibly imagine. (3) That nobody listens to what *she* says.

Julia believes in all the doctrines of the Church,

and is exemplary in her regular attendance at Holy Communion. She fasts on Fridays, and all Lent her mood is more penitential than ever. She bears the misfortunes of her friends with praiseworthy equanimity.

And what is the effect of such a person on the serious-minded agnostic? He demands, and he has a right to demand, that a Christian shall have more *serenity* than other people, a more *amiable temper*, less acid in the disposition, and more ability to endure absence of prestige and consideration.

*Jacobus* is a successful clergyman, a man of standing and importance; in person tall and presentable, in manner arrogant and overbearing. He works hard, and is punctilious in all matters of observance and ritual, yet I warrant you he can hasten through Matins more rapidly than any other priest in England. At an early age he must have been informed that the poor are not of like nature with ourselves; otherwise how could he adorn his sermons with such phrases as "mean as some of your homes may be—limited as may be your intellectual horizons—few as have been your opportunities—you yet, etc. etc." His particular aversion is a Nonconformist. It was when I was worshipping in his church in company with two Free Church friends of mine, that I heard Jacobus orate against Dissenters "cribb'd, cabined and confined in their conventicles", "mouthing their

shibboleths". Were you to see Jacobus with a bishop, you would hardly know the man. Meekness and humility have suddenly become his attributes, and an ingratiating smirk is painted on his countenance.

What do onlookers think of Christianity after they have met Jacobus? They have a right to ask that a man who follows Our Lord should show large-hearted charity and sympathy to his fellow-men, and see them as they are in the sight of God. His standards must not be class standards, nor sectarian standards, nor even ecclesiastical standards. The agnostic is quite clear that men like Jacobus are not going to put him in touch with God.

*Alexander* is an intelligent and well-educated layman. His most passionate conviction is that the world is very wicked, and he sees sin everywhere. His happiest hours are those spent in denunciation. His dearest certainty is that men are unable to find God because they will not leave crime and vice and the City of Destruction. Tell him you are unhappy in your soul, and he will judge you self-convicted of over-indulgence in some form of evil. His meek wife bears with him, but his sons and daughters have gone away, and he has no intimate friends. During the War he was an ardent militarist, and thundered denunciations of the Germans in language that was an almost exact translation of German anti-English orations.

To tell the truth, his non-Christian acquaintances do not take Alexander very seriously. He seems to them an odd survival from a past age, a quaint exponent of the Old Testament Christianity, really quite harmless. Which annoys him acutely, as you may imagine. It is certain, however, that the true Christian hates sin, but not the sinner, and even while hating his brother's sin, feels that he is in some mysterious way responsible for it, and identified with it. Our Lord bore our sins, not by means of some difficult theological doctrine about Atonement, but by way of His intense love for all men which made Him one with them. If the Christian stands apart and aloof and separate from his fellow-men, they will have none of him. He must share the common lot. This is especially true nowadays. Now that most people are well-educated, and able to think for themselves, they do not want outstanding prophets and moralists to lead them and order them about. What they need is Christian mystics living close to God in the ordinary walks of life. Mystics who are authors and school-teachers and clerks and gardeners and navvies. Mystics who do not condemn, but who understand.

*Timothy* has been a religious man for many years, but though his beliefs have delivered him from sin, they have by no means delivered him from fear. Timothy passes his life in a perpetual

panic. By day he lives in fear of what other people will say; fear of falling ill; fear of motor-cars, bills, dogs, thunderstorms; fear of not doing the correct thing. By night he trembles when he thinks of burglars, fire and death; and, perhaps most of all, his own inadequacy for the day's task awaiting him. He can never trust either circumstances or his fellow-men. He is terrified lest his children should leave the ways of their fathers and go exploring on their own account. What a strange God does Timothy worship! A God who has devised a world full of goblins and bogies, and set men defenceless and harried in their midst.

“If that’s what being a Christian means—!” the onlooker observes with a shrug of his shoulders. Instinctively he expects the highest courage of a Christian. A Christian should be able to say, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him”. Nothing short of that will do.

*Adèle*, on the other hand, is a delightful creature. Lively, smart, amusing, she changes her religion almost as often as a fashionable lady changes her clothes. Bred a High Churchwoman, she formerly delighted in elaborate ritual, and was genuinely touched with emotion when surrounded by the finest ecclesiastical pageantry. Presently she tired of ornate worship, and became a Quakeress. Very charming was *Adèle* when dressed in grey, very demure and pensive at “silent meeting”. The need

for communing with the Unseen led her, however, farther afield, and she became an Occultist. Ritual returned, this time performed by the lady herself, with cups and wands and symbols and other strange devices. A nervous breakdown followed, and Adèle was sent to a New Thought sanatorium to recuperate. Coming home in the best of health, with a sheaf of new ideas, Adèle became a fervent Christian Scientist, and most voluble on the subject of the Errors of Mortal Mind. An ankle sprained at tennis, and the reading of *Introspection and Recollection*, turned her thoughts in other directions, and made her think she was possibly not on the right track after all. Her doctor, a shrewd and charming old Scot, will very likely make a Presbyterian of her after all, unless she should chance to meet one of the Buddhist missionaries recently come to London, and then, who knows which way the dice will fall?

Dear Adèle, while each phase lasts, she is so much in earnest! Why does one feel inclined to laugh at her? It is, after all, not comedy but tragedy to be unable to disentangle the essential from the non-essential in various forms of religion. . .

Well, my dear Stranger, are you beginning to feel absolutely furious with me? I know you are not like any of my portrait-gallery. Perhaps

though you do see what I am aiming at. Two things are chiefly needed. An irradiation from within—by means of awareness of God—of ordinary everyday life. An equally vivid awareness of other people and of all their problems—so that you feel they are of equal importance with your own. I think if you will look back over History and see how men were walled in by the limitation of their century's outlook, you will understand why I am so certain that no one ought to try to solve his difficulties in *isolation*.

Good-bye, Stranger. Go on listening to God's voice through all the roar of London traffic.

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## XXVI. *From the Stranger to the Author.*

London.

**T**HANK you for your excellent and, alas! all too accurate thumbnail sketches. I think it does strike that long-suffering person, the “man in the street”, as strange that so many people who profess and call themselves Christians should be so sadly lacking in the

qualities of serenity, amiability of temper, and benevolence when Christ possessed all these, and more. I wonder why it is? Can it be that the Churches have lost their virtue, the spirit of Christ? One thing is at least certain: that the majority of people are sticklers for the letter of the law, and because it is such an unremunerative business they become harassed, thus cutting themselves off from the emollient properties which alone come from the spirit of Jesus Christ. If only we could be tolerant with the Julias of life—for they need our sympathy more than our censure!

It seems to me that the system which retails (I cannot think of a better word) comfort for our souls, is run on the wrong lines. See, out East the neophyte is taught to develop poise and dignity in his bearing, both interiorly and exteriorly, with the result that one can instinctively *feel* a power. But what is the lot of the average Westerner? At an early age he is doled out the dry unnourishing husks of his forbears' religion, and it is cold, unsatisfying food, indeed. Why are we taught to believe the story of Jonah and the whale, and the rest, when there are such wondrous things to talk about and explain as the miraculous power of Love? Doesn't it strike you that we concentrate upon the shell and ignore the kernel? "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he"—in other words, if we are taught to think of the mere shells of the

Christian belief then we ourselves become mere shells.

I find it difficult to describe my ideal of a mystic, or a Christian, if you will. *The* ideal is Christ Himself, yet since we cannot be Christs in one leap, we can, of course, *aim* to be. How would I like to be? I would fain possess a heart, which should at all times be turned to God Himself in thankfulness and adoration; a heart, too, which would pour out upon a struggling humanity all the soothing power of which love is alone capable. A heart which, by reason of its inherent sympathy, would understand the particular troubles and struggles of others.

If I possessed Love in its fulness, all other things—even a sense of humour, I truly believe—would be added unto me. The mention of humour may strike you as both irreverent and irrelevant, but after all, what is it which reduces our difficulties so rapidly and so faithfully to the correct proportions, as this sense?

Yes, how utterly right you are! A Christian *should* have more serenity than other people, a more amiable temper, less acid in his disposition, and be more able to endure absence of prestige and consideration. . .

Personally I am thankful that part of my make-up consists of a combination of puerility and ingenuousness. It's a pleasant relaxation from

official life, I find. But I know how much of me is this thing: I cannot—just to give you an example—describe to you the feelings I get when I read the delicious lines of T. E. Brown's *Vespers*. To me there is something *spirituel*, divine in them which brings me nearer to God than many a longer, grander, and much more lavish piece of work.

*O Blackbird, what a boy you are!  
How you do go it!  
Blowing your bugle to that one sweet star—  
How you do blow it!  
And does she hear you, blackbird boy, so far—  
Or is it wasted breath?  
"Good Lord! she is so bright  
To-night!"  
The blackbird saith.*

I cannot remember whether I told you, in my last letter, that I am reading the *Autobiography of Madame Guyon*, and of the tremendous impression it is making upon me. Here, *par excellence*, is the vivid and very intimate story of a soul's struggle towards its emancipation and ultimate union with its Divine Source.

There are a few points which I would like to mention.

Do you recall, in one of my early letters, that I

maintained that I could understand the point of view of the girl who wished to enter a convent because she had been disappointed in love? Mme Guyon's case was almost similar, for it was her marriage which definitely turned her towards a life of piety. Desperately unhappy through the ill-treatment of her husband and mother-in-law, it was sharply brought home to her that the world could not satisfy her craving for peace, nor alone could she possess the strength to bear her lot.

Like many (if not all?) of the Saints, she suffered seven years of the most acute aridity, and with a tremendous care for detail, and at great length, does she describe that awful time and the feeling of *impotence* which assailed her. This quotation should, at any rate sustain those whose ways seem dark :

*“ O poor creatures, who pass all your life in tasting the gifts of God, and who think thereby you are the most favoured and the most happy; how I yet pity you, if you do not go to my God through the loss of those same gifts! How many souls pass all their life in this way, and believe themselves prodigies!”*

But many, I know, condemn Mme Guyon's method. Yet is there anything to condemn, when it is clearly shown that she arrived at her goal? *Autres temps, autres mœurs,*

Now as to my own state: I confess that I have not experienced those stirrings of devotion with which I was blessed when I was away. But this worries me not a bit. As I have told you, I ask for no favours, but to fulfil His Will: to possess a heart so aflame with the love of God that I can delight in obliterating all sense of self. In rare moments I get the most fleeting, yet withal entrancing, feeling that all is well. Am I not right, then, in cherishing these waves of inspiration as they come, and then try to push on with greater vigour towards the goal?



## XXVII. *From the Author to the Stranger.*

Cambridge.

I ALSO used to think that in the East the neophyte was taught a great deal that the Christian beginner is not taught, and ought to be taught, but a little research soon proved to me that the systems of spiritual development in Buddhism and Hinduism are practically a dead letter as far as the laity are concerned. It is just the same over here. If you went into a monastery

you would receive a great deal of very careful and very likely exceedingly skilful instruction. It is generally assumed, however, that the ordinary Christian prefers to develop on his own lines, and to please himself about his own spiritual exercises. He can have silent meditation among the Society of Friends, the stimulus of class-meetings among the Wesleyans, intellectual delight from the Presbyterians, confession and the discipline of penance with the High Church party, and many beautiful and reverent services in his own parish church anywhere. Do the critics of the churches take advantage of all the opportunities offered them? I doubt it. You shouldn't demand more until you are quite certain you have made full use of what you have. However, I mustn't be rude to critics, as I was one myself in my last letter, if I remember rightly.

I do think, though, that all the modern psychological knowledge about the normal unfolding and development of the human soul ought to be much more accessible to the general public than it now is. I don't want the spiritual life to be made out absurdly easy, any more than in school I want children to have nothing but play-lessons. What I want is that men and women should be taught how to use their spiritual powers *in order* to overcome difficulties, just as children need to be taught to use what brains they have, in order

that they may enjoy the exhilaration of learning what is difficult.

Certainly no one ought to have “the husks of his forbears’ religion” “doled out to him”. Religion ought, above all, to be a personal adventure, a new discovery, a quest. Your parents and your spiritual teachers ought to give you your horse and your road-book and a blessing, and see you set out alone —no more.

Some years ago, when I was reading a paper before the Modern Churchmen at Girton, I suggested that knowledge about the needs and powers of the soul was now so far advanced that there ought to be a kind of Harley Street of religious practitioners, to whom all people, sick or well, in need of advice could go. Some of these practitioners should be priests, others laymen and women of religious experience, all equipped with up-to-date psychological knowledge. However, the Modern Churchmen were not modern enough to agree with my scheme. They told me I was the *enfant terrible* of the conference, and proceeded to discuss other matters. I wasn’t a bit cross with them—I am far too used to having my brilliant ideas turned down!

Now I see that the vicar of St. Martin-in-the-Fields has originated just the same plan. It comes with more weight from him, as it arose out of immediate practical need. The broadcast services

bring in so many letters that something will have to be done to cope with them. The general public is not in the least indifferent to religion. It is passionately, desperately interested. Only, for some mysterious reason, it is suspicious of its church or chapel next door. I think it wants the advice of specialists. It imagines that the church next door will offer it theology that was charmingly in the fashion fifty years ago, but which would make a man look a fool if he took to it now. There *is* expert knowledge tucked away in books and in men's hearts, and so on. Why shouldn't the general public be able to get at it? In the end a man may find that all the advice amounts to, is that he should read the Gospels and go to church, just as a man consulting a tuberculosis specialist may merely be told to live in a natural way in the fresh air. All the same, the expert will have told the patient *how* to read the Gospels, and what psychological effect churchgoing will have on him. The specialist could never *make* a man good, any more than a doctor can *make* a man well. He can, though, suggest to him how to develop health, what are the essentials to right spiritual living, and, by being good himself, inspire his patient with courage to think out his own way of right living.

Anyhow, I think the experiment ought to be tried. If you hear any news of it, let me know.

Dear me! Are there *still* people in England

(I know there are in America) bothering themselves because they think it is wicked not to believe literally in the story of Jonah and the whale? Twenty years ago Dr. Johnston Ross called it, in my hearing, "a novel with a purpose". I don't know—*The Times* seems to think whales *can* swallow men and have done so more than once. But, either way, what *does* it matter? You might prove to-morrow that the whole of the narrative parts of the Old Testament were imaginative fiction, and the relation between God and your soul would not thereby be in the least affected. Essentials—essentials—essentials . . .

To change the subject, "Puerility and ingenuousness"—oh, Stranger, you are a little too discourteous to yourself. A quick response to beauty, even in its simplest forms, a capacity for being lighthearted—yes, excellent endowments.

To change the subject again. You want to know what I think of Madame Guyon. Yes, yes—but I don't expect you to agree with me altogether. I am quite willing to admire her enormously, if you do not want me to think her one of the *great* saints. She is a little saint—one of the daisies or the buttercups of the heavenly garden. In her quiet way she is very beautiful, and she certainly had a great talent for describing the delicate shades of the soul's intercourse with God. Still, when all is said and done, I find her just a little depressing.

Madame Guyon had no sense of humour and not much sense of proportion. Her mind was not over-robust. She is wonderful but pathetic—more like a semi-invalid who shows amazing courage in misfortune, a “brave poor thing” than a stalwart spirit. I am more attracted by the fiery intensity of St. John of the Cross, or the intense compassion of St. François de Sales, or the shrewd, practical mysticism of William Law. At certain stages of one’s progress she is an excellent companion, but she is apt to make one think that the spiritual life is all grey tones. I like a gentle resignation to a maimed life less than the high courage which exults in the bearing of pain for the sake of God’s joy.

Still there is a certain limpid simplicity and directness about her Method of Prayer which is admirable. Her note is needed in the Christian symphony, even if there are others more powerful and more sonorous.

As for the girl who wanted to take the veil because she had been crossed in love, part of the point of the story—if one may unmathematically speak of part of a point!—was that she had had *two* disappointments, and the Mother Superior had enough insight to see that she would probably have accepted a third eligible young man if one had been forthcoming! The moral was that it doesn’t do to turn to God in a fit of pique—not that the inevitable sorrows of life have nothing to teach us.

One thing that I should like the spiritual specialists to teach their patients is the avoidance of *unnecessary* sorrows and difficulties in their spiritual progress in order that they may keep their strength for overcoming the unavoidable ones. Also that they may learn to train their will instead of relying on religious impulses and emotionalism.

You seem to me to be getting on famously. When I first met you, you were clamouring for "consolations", and feeling sure something was desperately wrong because you could not at all times experience spiritual sweetness. Now, though you are all the more ready and able to rejoice in the sense of God's nearness, should it come, you are going on bravely doing His will. I can't quite tell you *how* pleased I am!



## XXVIII. *From the Stranger to the Author.*

London.

I DARE not think how many months have slipped by without my having the decency to write to you. I do not think I even sent you a card from France, where we spent our summer holiday! So long ago, is it, you see, that I have forgotten that. Anyhow, please be consoled

with the thought that I have written you many letters in my mind, and I only hope that whatever I have to tell you now will make some sort of amends for my seeming lack of consideration.

But, first, how are you? I sincerely hope that all is well and that the richness of your interior life increases; for that, after all, is the best that one can wish for one's friends, isn't it?

For my part, I have had—during this all-too-long interval—a series of “ups and downs”; but, if I am honest, I must tell you that the “ups” outweigh the “downs”, which—as you would say—is salutary. Yes, to-day there is within me (and I say this very gratefully) a much more contented spirit, something akin to the sense of *awareness* which I experienced years ago. But I must not precipitate.

Where shall I begin? . . . In your last letter you encouraged me by saying that I was “getting on famously”—and then, I remember, I wrote in reply a sort of pæan of optimistic reflections—but that is all I can recall at the moment, save that soon after I sent it off to you my despondent moods recommenced, continuing fairly consistently until late last Spring, when I met a friend, who was instrumental in putting me wiser about myself. I ought to mention that he is a man of much spirituality, and during my short stay at his cottage in Sussex (miles from anywhere!) we talked of

many things, including the health of my immortal soul. I told him briefly of your and my correspondence, and confided that, whilst I knew that my interior well-being had improved tremendously since our contact, yet there was a something lacking which I could not describe, nor for which I could adequately account. I endeavoured to explain my state (as, indeed, I have tried to explain it to you) as a lack of warmth in my emotions, an emptiness. My friend thereupon proceeded to talk at length on the power and influence of Love, adding: "If you would progress spiritually, then love God. Give yourself to Him utterly. Tread the heroic path, and ask for nothing, save that you may love Him with all your heart, mind, soul and strength."

In a flash I realized three important things: (a) how completely right my friend was, (b) that it was love that I lacked, and (c) that I really loved, in those far-off days of my "spiritual dignity". The effect of this realization was extraordinary, for, knowing the truth of it all, I understood almost too clearly why I should have experienced, to such a prolonged degree, that awful aridity in my internal mechanism; rather like an engine grinding itself out through want of lubrication and incidentally affecting its parts in the process. As I say, it all seemed amazingly clear to me, and I returned to town a decidedly changed

man. I felt, within me, that I had recovered some stupendous truth, long laid buried under I don't know what; and, at the mere thought of my friend's words, feelings of devotion surged through me, bringing in their train little thrills which were wholly delightful. As I cast my mind back to my first spiritual experience I now see that it was this quality of love for God which transformed my inner and outer visions so that I could see and feel the Divine Immanence in everybody and everything. Men, I told you, walked like gods, even if they did so unconsciously, asleep.

It was a most stimulating and wonderful time that I spent in this Sussex hamlet: there was, in my friend's simple household, an atmosphere of quiet power which was as refreshing as it was a change from the rushing life I am forced to lead in town. I felt that I could have remained in this backwater of intense spiritual activity for many, many days.

The longest (I might say almost the only) period of conversation took place on the night of my arrival—one of those fragrant and starry nights which spell the imminent approach of summer. We sat, I well remember, in his sparsely-furnished yet comfortable room, lighted by the restful rays of an oil-lamp, and as soon as I had partaken of some food we pushed back our chairs and talked until the early hours of the morning. My friend's

intention was that the process of "unburdening" should take place right away, in order that the remainder of the time could be devoted to meditation—which was an admirable plan. Indeed, so intent was my friend that every possible moment should be used profitably that he laughingly suggested that, from the morrow, we would maintain absolute silence—exchanging views and so on, by writing to each other on slips of paper. I fell in with this suggestion enthusiastically, for I not only saw the wisdom of the project, but I somehow felt that I was once again back in the household of those good friends of mine of whom I spoke in one of my early letters.

The long talk did me a world of good: I was equally relieved to say my say as I was to hear the wise counsel and sympathetic replies of my friend. He observed that my description of my feeling of "emptiness" was apt; that I literally was empty within through the "burning up" process of my long period of aridity. This, he said, was most hopeful, and if I could simply dedicate myself to a life of love—without any ulterior motives—I would find, *from this very moment of our contact*, that my interior life would change. And so it has been. I have, of course, had temporary setbacks (which is but natural), but my progress has proceeded on its even tenor.

I wish one could explain Love! But, then, to do so would be to explain the Deity. You see, dear Straightener, my present position is curious: I can often interpret my existing state from my early experience. . . Do I make myself clear? No, I fear I'm getting into deep water and cannot frame into words the subtle thoughts which crowd my mind.

But how commonsensible Christ was when He gave His new commandment "that ye love one another"—for in very truth the *bhakti*'s way of approach is the easiest and quickest.

Since I last wrote to you I have done much reading and have again been browsing over those erudite aphorisms of Nârada (*Nârada Sutras*). How instinct with the deepest truth they are! The natural outpourings of a man of realization. "Love," he declares, "is easier than other methods"; and "obtaining which man becomes perfect, becomes immortal, becomes satisfied. And obtaining which he desires nothing, grieves not, hates not, does not delight (in sensuous objects), makes no effort (for selfish ends). Knowing which he becomes intoxicated (with joy), transfixed, and rejoices in the Self."

Harking back again to those "happy, early days, when I shined in my Angel infancy", I must mention that then certain truths unfolded themselves before me, and, whilst I have since been able to

carry the memory of them across the intervening years, yet I have not, until this very moment (and that is precisely why I now break my silence to you), been able to realize them as vital truths. It would have been so easy for me (not to say black-guardly) to have written you glowing accounts of some imaginary realizations, so that you would have exclaimed, "You are making amazing progress," and so on. But now the time has come when I feel that I possess the right to say what has, thank God, been borne upon me with renewed intensity.

On reading the *Gospel of Ramakrishna*, the saint of Dakshineswar, and now the *Life* of his disciple Norendra, I have been forcibly struck by the precedence that *Bhakta Yoga* is given in the Hindu Approach. Indeed, Ramakrishna declares again and again that we live in an age when Love must take first place, and it may sound trite to prophesy that all the many facets of Truth represented by the various creeds will assuredly one day be drawn together through the common denominator of Love. The teachings of Christ, Himself the greatest *bhakti* the world has ever seen, will be accepted by men of all castes and creeds—though perhaps not under the name of Christ.

But to continue. You are doubtless wondering how my meditations are progressing. Well. Very

well. More than ever do I not ask (I hope you can disentangle this Irishism) for any sort of recompense, save that my heart may be aflame with love for Christ. This I utter many times a day, for I realize that it is *all* that matters and that the possession of a loving, devoted and surrendered heart transforms the entire outlook on life as nothing else can. Had not this transformation taken place in my own life, then I could not, I believe, have been able to tackle the difficulties and disappointments (petty, maybe, but real) which I have been up against during the past three months. Upon reflection I find it extraordinary how I should have been able to emerge with such "brow serene". My meditations, then, along this line of thought are moments of beauty and peace; and I shall, I hope, eventually arrive at the enviable state which a business friend of mine has attained. He is, I must mention, a man of many interests, and I was much impressed when, a few days ago, he casually said to me *apropos* trying to translate one's mundane affairs into higher spheres, "I do not work for my *employers*."

Again I must not digress. . . . I observe old characteristics reasserting themselves. As you know, I am susceptible to beauty, whether in nature, music, literature, or art. This, I believe, is being gradually accentuated. For example, I find myself much more moved to a condition

verging on tears than heretofore. Professor William James observes, in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*: "Especially if we weep! For it is then as if our tears broke through an inveterate inner dam and let all sorts of ancient peccancies and moral stagnancies drain away, leaving us now washed and soft of heart and open to every nobler leading." "The Roman Catholic Church," he goes on to say, "traditionally reveres as a special grace the so-called gift of tears."

. . .

Shall I ever finish this letter? In my present mood it seems unlikely, for so many thoughts chase each other across my mind. If only I could sort them out, then something of real value might emerge!

There is at least one point which I would like to mention, and it is of the (psychologically speaking) "twice-born" types of which William James speaks and to which I indubitably belong. It would appear that, to make any real spiritual progress in this life, the will must be set Godwards with all the intensity of feeling of which one is capable. I know that as one progresses new vistas unroll themselves—a sort of divine will-o'-the-wisps, but, even after years and years of interior exercising, the devotee still thirsts, still yearns for the highest

realization. . . If only we could attain to that degree of intensity which manifested itself, say, in Europe in the fourteenth century. Take, for example, the classic case of Henry Suso! It is so easy, isn't it? to decry such vehemence of purpose as mere fanaticism. Call it what you will, it certainly does put some of us to shame with our ridiculously tiny and lukewarm piety. Indian history, too, abounds with cases of men and women who spend their entire lives searching for Realization—spending hours, days even, meditating, "watching and praying continually". I love these lines from *The Light of Asia* describing Buddha's meditations:

*"By day and night here dwelt the world-honoured,  
Subduing that fair body born for bliss  
With fast and frequent watch and search intense  
Of silent meditation, so prolonged  
That oftentimes while he mused—as motionless  
As the fixed rock his seat—the squirrel leaped  
Upon his knee, the timid quail led forth  
Her brood beneath his feet, and blue doves pecked  
The rice-grains from the bowl beside his hand."*

I wish one had access to a fuller and more intimate account of Christ's life, for I have long found myself drawn to the biographies and auto-

biographies of Eastern and Western saints and teachers; and, whilst indirectly they excite my love for Christ Himself (for I know that all religions are but different facets of the one great Truth), yet I feel that if ever a contemporary "Life" were discovered it would give Christianity a renewed grip on the imaginations of the people—not to say on the world at large. But this is mere idle speculation. Do you not agree, however, that it is only through becoming intimately acquainted with the lives of saints and masters (by "masters" I mean, of course, such manifestations as Christ, Buddha, Mohammed) that one really gets to know them as the wonders of evolution that they are. In a word, they cease to be legendary figures. . . .

But, people will object, times have changed and the life of the ascetic—Eastern or Western—does not compel him to catch trains to the City, nor does he have to live in crowded streets. This is only too true, but it is their *intensity* of devotion we need—vitally. One's head swirls at the mere thought of such continued and unfailing devotion to their Ideal. Imagine the quantity of the milk of human kindness which would flow if we of the West were more studious in this regard! Our grey, tired world would be transformed into a paradise; and how foolish our Leagues of Nations and Peace Pacts would then appear to us!

Yes, the acquisition of intense love for God, through Christ, is our only salvation. The paths of approach through work or knowledge or speech are as nothing compared with this royal road, for, "being self-evident, it does not depend on other truths".

Some few weeks ago I was meditating on this matter, and the following came to me (I made a note of it at the time):

"Love is *the* Divine quality, *par excellence*, for out of it emerges all other godly attributes: faithfulness, faith, peace, patience, purity, selflessness, service, hope and understanding. Its effect (even in its lower manifestations) spreads a flush of warmth over the chilled or slumbering soul, infusing a revitalising influence to the weary; so that, at its blessed touch, the sleeper awakes to find a golden world around him. Love is the Kingdom of God within each of us."

Pretty trite, perhaps, but nevertheless born of an inner conviction which has changed my life from a muddled, hopeless (yet I really think tolerably tenacious) longing into something resembling those "early days". As I have said, I occasionally experience, at the most unexpected times, little thrills—how *can* one describe these things?—of adoration which seem to make all struggling

worth while! If they are ever again taken from me may I be grateful enough to remember their fragrance!

Now, should I ever be placed in the position of advising or helping those less fortunate than myself, I would, like Nârada, declare that the easiest way to "perfection" is through Love, which carries with it self-surrender: to pray, entreat, beg, with stupendous intensity of will, for a heart aflame with devotion. Such concentration of desire will not go unanswered, and gradually this Form will be quickened and born within us. . . I would say, too, that one should ask for no sweetesses or signs!

Which reminds me. I must mention a little incident which may interest you. Whilst not actually asking for a sign at Christmas, yet (with the perversity to which the children of men are heir) I felt that it would be distinctly encouraging if last Christmas could come to mean something more than the usual round of happiness. Dinner over, crackers were pulled—and out of my first fell a little silver cross! Well, I've pulled crackers for more years than I care to remember, but in all my life I have never experienced anything like this. Have you? The contents are as a rule of a merry or highly sentimental nature. What does it mean? Is it a reminder that *Via Crucis, Via Lucis*?

In spite of its terrible length, this letter does not contain anything like all the things I set out to write about! It is always the way. Still, whatever its shortcomings, it may yet help you to piece together the scattered mosaics of my curious make-up. And, having tried to unburden myself "to date", it is possible that I shall maintain an equally long silence as before. (Do you realize that it is nearly a year since we last corresponded?)

I must thank you, though, for your patient understanding and help you've ungrudgingly given me. It is pleasant to have such a correspondent.

Good night! I am very tired—and so are you, I'm sure!



## XXIX. *From the Author to the Stranger.*

Cambridge.

SO what we have been waiting for has happened, and you have found your own special road to God! The way, perhaps, which is the best and surest for most men, the way of love, the way of rapturous devotion. Now, indeed, I need not warn you against "trying to coax something out of God", because, if you love and ask for nothing in return, those gifts which you

formerly coveted are, by a divine paradox, yours already. Loving, you gain courage, steadfastness, serenity, joy. It is very wonderful.

I feel a little humbled to think that, when I told you so much, I was not able to convince you which was the right road for you. But mere telling was not enough. When you went and stayed with a man who was living every hour of the day to the glory of God, you found that his enthusiasm and his insight communicated themselves to you. That is as it should be. I am sure it was not so much the man's words, wise and true as they doubtless were, which helped you, but the light which shines from those who stand in the Presence of God.

Now you know what you must do if you want, in your turn, to transmit the light! As for me, I had better pray more and talk less. I will remember!

I hope you feel now that all the long years of aridity have been worth while. The soul progresses like a train passing through hilly country. When it plunges into a tunnel one could imagine it complaining: "Alas! what has happened! I have left the sunlight and the wide view over the countryside and am immersed in this dark and noisesome thoroughfare. Shall I stop or go back?" But on it goes and out into the light again, finding that it has thrust a way through a Hill of Difficulty that it could never have climbed.

Of course, your present state of mind is connected with your past experiences—it is all part of the same journey, and the one would have been impossible without the other. The times of despondency were not deviations, but only stages. I verily believe that unless a man passes through bitterness of soul he cannot truly see God.

Now I am going to tell you something strange. The beginning of this correspondence was, as you may remember, your asking help of me, and all along I have done my best to put at your disposal any thought, any experience, any knowledge that I imagined might be profitable to you. Sometimes I worried over you as if you had been my own child. And then, when I thought you were learning and progressing, I felt enormously happy.

It never occurred to me, all the same, that *I* was going to get anything out of the correspondence. In all simplicity of mind I assumed that I was going to give and you receive. Not by any means, though!

You have evidently forgotten that, when you were on your way to stay in Sussex, you sent me a hasty note, scribbled in the train, just telling me that you were going to spend some days with a friend of God. I determined that, as far as I was able, I would, during those few days, pray for you continually. I wanted, as it were, to take your soul in my hands and hold it before God.

The most wonderful thing happened. With Our Lord as my guide (for I think I am more definitely Christian than you are) I found myself in the presence of God as never before. All day long I could feel Him living and moving in the world. I seemed conscious of Him whichever way I turned, whether I perceived Him through the visible glory that He lays on sky and earth, or through the beauty of holiness in the acts of men, or through music and poetry, or through the sacraments of the Church. Everyone became ten times as interesting and as lovable as before; I could see right down through people's idiosyncrasies to the "divine spark" in each one of them. I could feel the essential current of each man's life flowing towards God (please forgive a change of metaphor!) as I could feel the whole of humanity united into one cry of longing for reunion with the Divine. Love towards God and love towards my fellow-men were seen to be part of one perfect whole. Christ, equally in touch with the divine and the human, living in both eternity and time, perfect symbol and perfect reality, was with me during all those wonderful days and gave to me, though I cannot describe it, a joy and an understanding than which Heaven itself can, it seems to me, hold nothing better.

The mood of exaltation passed, of course, but even the memory of it is precious beyond words.

I suppose the experience came to me because I wanted to be of use to you and was not bothering about myself at all. Anyhow, since it was connected with my prayers for you, I thank you for it!

So, you see, my rôle has been not that of the Lady Almoner, but of the humble beggar at the King's gate!

